To Defy the Devil *completed*

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by LivingOnTheEdge5

Summary

Hannibal's emotions wash over Will: strength, power, pleasure, and lust, they wind around, and constrict him, like a sensuous snake. Hannibal's eyes are dark and feral, his dilated pupils showing only of the smallest hint of brown. Will's eyes dart around Hannibal's face, then he swallows, licking and biting his dry lips. He hears his own breathing, rapid and ragged. Hannibal's gaze is drawn downward as he watches the slow drag of Will's Adam's apple as it raises and lowers; then as if in slow motion, he watches the pull and tug of Will's teeth and tongue. Will's pink lips slowly part and Hannibal drops the hammer and presses forward. Will feels the heat radiating off of Hannibal's broad chest and his breath is reduced to little puffs. Hannibal capture's Will's eyes as he slowly, and deliberately leans in and nestles into the exposed skin of Will's neck.

Hannibal inhales deeply.

Hannibal Lecter has kidnapped Will Graham and plans to leave America with his friend. Will Graham's son, plans to be reunited with his father, whatever it takes.

Notes

this story fleshes out the events which occurred ' off camera' in Patatino. I kinda gave the ending away at the end of that story because I wasn't certain I would continue.

See the end of the work for more notes

Aftermath

William can't say how long he's been sitting here dry eyed amongst the weeds.

After he watched Hannibal's car disappear around a bend, William drew his knees to his chest and clasped them tightly. He doesn't think that the car will stop, reverse, and come back for him. He doesn't believe he will ever see his father, Will Graham again. When Hannibal had murdered a man in front of him, he had shown William his true, authentic self; an event few experienced and survived. William appreciates the irony. He looks down at the scuffed tops of his Converse sneakers and feels disconnected from his body, like he's floating. It's a drowsy feeling, he decides, and not wholly unpleasant. He wonders if he should just stay here, sleep here, and, eventually die here; the thought doesn't frighten him. He wonders if this is what being insane feels like.

The summer afternoon holds the promise of fall. The wind stirring the seed pods around him is already cool. A bee buzzes by, and somewhere , nearby a grasshopper chirps. With a jolt, William realizes that in spite of all that has happened, the whole world hasn't stopped; just the tiny scrap he exists on.

Twenty feet away, the rancher's truck is still idling on the road, but, inside, there is no movement. William wonders how long before the truck runs out of gas. He supposes the driver is dead.

'Is Hannibal Lecter going to kill my dad?' he wonders.

'He was mine before he was yours' Hannibal had said to him.

No. Hannibal doesn't want to kill his father; he wants him all to himself.

William begins to gently rock back and forth, singing a song his mother would sing when he was small:

Been a long time traveling

here

below

Been a long time traveling

Away from my home

It was an Appalachian folksong, slow and haunting. William remembers how, he would lie, cozy in bed, while his mother rubbed his back and sang the chorus over and over until he was relaxed and boneless. Sometimes, as he drifted into sleep, her soft voice would retell how her

own mother had sung it to her when she was a little girl, and her mother before her; a chain of mothers stretching back in time, connected through love and a song. William closes his eyes, the better to remember his mother's touch. When he was younger, he had never given much thought to the words, but as he sings them now, their meaning takes on flesh and bone. He sees the songwriter, the traveler of the song; threadbare but proud, walking a rutted, dirt trail, through the mists of a Smoky Mountain dawn, missing his family, hoping one day to return. The pathos of this image releases something in William and he feels hot tears pressing from behind his eyelids to seep down his face.

The part of William's mind that shows him things other people can't see is chanting in a sing song voice; a clear mockery of how William is singing.

'Gone, gone, gone, your dad is gone.' the voice observes.

'Gone traveling', William corrects.

'Gone traveling on the floor of a murderer's car', his mind unhelpfully supplies.

William opens his eyes. Everything is just as it was before;same roadside ditch, same prickly dried weeds, same idling truck. William forces himself up to his knees and then to his feet, wincing from the pins and needles shooting through his legs. Clumsily, he walks to the truck and looks inside the open window. The driver is clearly dead, his nose gone, his skull's nasal bone visible and glossy with blood. For the second time that day, Will Graham's son throws up, retching against the truck. He doesn't realize that he is no longer alone until he feels a hand on his shoulder.

"Is everything ok...Jesus Christ!!!" a man's voice yells.

The hand on his shoulder grips harder, and William is spun around and away from the truck. A man large, and broad,with a dark red face, is looming above him; he looks, and sounds angry.

"Did you do this?"he demands of William.

William gapes at him idiotically, the taste of bile bitter in his mouth. When the boy doesn't respond, the man grasps his t-shirt collar and marches him back to where a car is stopped behind the truck. A woman, in the passenger seat starts screaming; she has seen John's body from the road.

"Fuck!!" the man yells when he sees what she has become hysterical about. "What did you do boy?!" the man is gripping his shirt tighter and shaking him "kill your whole family? Chris, " he orders the woman, "call the cops."

"Dan, be careful" his wife wavers from the front seat. " he could be dangerous."

William hangs limply in the man's grasp as he's searched for weapons. William's t-shirt is so tight across his throat now, that he's having a hard time swallowing or breathing, but he's too scared to protest.

"So, kid, are you still dangerous?" the man mocks William. William can feel a wave of excited arousal pour from the man; he was enjoying this."Where's your mom at? " The man shakes him a little to encourage his response " Did you kill her too? Is that your dad up there in the yard?"

William licks his lips, "I didn't kill anyone "he croaks, struggling for breath "the man who killed them took my dad. " William points to John " That's not my dad, that's my friend."

William wishes the man would loosen his grip or let his shirt go so he could take a proper breath. He feels his knees buckling as his lungs struggle for air. The man, notices his labored breathing and suddenly lets go. William collapses to his knees, his lungs heaving as they strive to take in oxygen . Slumped onto his knees, head bowed, William's view is little more than the man's shoes and the cuffs of his pants. Unbidden, William's mind is now seeing and feelings things that are echoes of past events. William watches as these same shoes kick a boy who is cowering before them. He gasps and looks at his arms, expecting to see the dark, tender bruises left from fists being slammed into them again and again; but his arms are unmarked. William looks up into the man's face , feeling the same sadistic pleasure the man feels as he strikes his own, cringing children. Using the car's fender to pull himself up, William stands before the man, his face twisted into a hard, cruel expression. Startled, the man looks down, taken aback at the sudden transformation.

"You're fucking crazy" he says taking a step back.

"Dan?!!" the woman sounds panicked.

"Shut the fuck up!!! " Dan yells at her, and William is shown images of her beatings and humiliations as well; like images projected on a flapping sheet.

"You deserve to die" the boy tells the man, and he wonders whom he's speaking as; the thought scares him.

When the police eventually arrive, they find William sitting, against the truck's front tire. Dan and his wife are waiting in their locked car. William is led back to the house by one officer while the other takes a statement from the couple; their voices are shrill and agitated as they pour out their story. On the way up the walkway, William and the cop pass by John's body.

"This your dad?"the cop asks.

"No, William repeats "my dad was taken."

"He mixed up in some kind of drugs? " The cop is hazarding the most likely guess.

"No," William replies.

When he finally enters the house, William goes straight to his father's bed, curls up and falls, exhausted, into a deep sleep. The cop watches him for a few seconds then decides to let him sleep undisturbed while he waits for the rest of his team.

When William wakes up , he finds he's been laid out on the back seat of a police cruiser. He looks out the window to see nothing but pitch black outside. Frightened, he huddles on the cold plastic wondering if he will be sent to prison for the murders Hannibal committed.

" You awake boy? " The same cop as before was looking at him through his rearview mirror.

"Yes," answered William, nothing would be gained by pretending.

"We're taking you back to the station, for now. Just until we can get everything sorted out. Sound good?" the cop said.

William didn't bother replying, good or not, this situation was all too wretchedly familiar.

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Virginia

Chapter Summary

William eats grilled cheese, Hannibal gets his prize home.

Chapter Notes

For those of you with medical knowledge, please ignore the description of Hannibal's wound and treatment (pay no attention to the man behind the curtain)
You can visit the Wolf Trap's jail by watching any episode of the "Andy Griffith Show"
forgot to mention that the rancher's death was from "A History of Violence"- one of the best movies ever.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Just take all your things off , put them in the bag, and put these on" says the policewoman. It is late, nearly ten o'clock in the small rural police station outside of Wolf Trap. The police officer hands William a stack of folded clothes and a paper sack to put his own clothes in; he is being processed.
In spite of what he was going through; he likes it here. The station was new in the 1950's and hasn't been updated since. The walls are wooden beadboard and the flooring is black and while tiles. There is only one cell, empty tonight, and it's housed in the same room where the officers' desks are. The station was lit by lamps, not bright fluorescent bulbs, and is cozy and quiet; William's frazzled nerves are soothed by it.
"You OK sweetie?" the officer asks when he doesn't immediately take the proffered items.
"Yeah," he replies, taking the clothes and the bag into the bathroom to change.
The clothes she'd given him are a strange combination; black women's yoga pants and a man's plain white t-shirt . He blushes when he realizes he will have to give up his underwear but there is no replacement. After he dresses, William ponders what he'd see if he looked at his reflection; himself, or some other person, the one who would have blithely slit a man's throat hours earlier. Like a child afraid of summoning "Bloody Mary" he errs on the side of safety and leaves without a glance at any reflective surface.
The woman officer, 'Call me Liz' she had told him, smiles approvingly as he hands her the bag filled with his old clothes.
"Shit", the desk sergeant was hanging up the phone. "That was the media. We're going to be swarmed here faster than you can say 'Boo Radley."
"Or Hannibal the Cannibal" William offers.
The sergeant looks at William as though he's never seen him before; giving him a quick once over before addressing Liz.

"Is he all done?" he asks
"Yes" said Liz" I've just got his clothes to send in."
"What about a ...you know." the officer quirks his eyebrows.
"A rape kit?" pipes up William.
'Okay, why did I say that out loud? ' he thinks, face blushing hot, as both officers turn startled gazes his way. He has a hazy idea of what such an item was, but knows immediately that it was a bad idea to have vocalized the man's thoughts.
"Ummm. I'm good" he falters.
Liz and the sergeant share a 'look' and William winces.
"Maybe you should run him by the clinic, just to play it safe." the sergeant says in a quiet aside to Liz before turning and addressing William in a hearty manner.
"You're going to stay over at Liz's house tonight William. Are you ready to go?"
"Yes" William agrees shyly, wondering if they will be stopping by 'the clinic' as threatened.
"Great!" Liz flashes him a smile and grabs her duffle, "Let's go! I'm parked just outside."

'*Okay I never want to go through that again* ' thinks William. The visit to the clinic was everything he had hoped it wouldn't be and more. Months before, when he had first been hospitalized after his mother's murder, he had been in and out of consciousness so wasn't fully cognizant of the particulars of his various examinations. Tonight, however was different. He was fully awake and aware of all of it , and he'd hated and resented every question and prod.
"Its alright, kiddo, "Liz reassures him as he emerges, rattled, from the exam room." Sometimes we just have to go through things we don't like very much, me included." She reaches out her hand to him and William takes it; Liz squeezes it once as they walk back to her beat up Civic.

When William walks inside Liz's apartment that night, "girly" was the first adjective that popped into his head, followed closely by "messy." It is a small 'economy' model, and smells like patchouli oil and coffee. A bike hangs from hooks in the ceiling ,and stacks of magazines and lipstick-marked coffee mugs rest on every flat surface; William warms to it instantly.
Even though it's long past midnight, Liz insists on making William a snack; grilled cheese sandwich and hot cocoa. And, in spite of everything, once William takes a tentative first bite, he finds he is ravenously hungry; ending up eating two whole sandwiches and two cups of cocoa. Liz sips a cup of tea to keep him company, watching with good humored incredulity while he stuffs himself. When William accidently knocks a bread crust to the ground, a memory is triggered.
"The dogs!!!" he cries, stricken.
Liz frowns " You mean the ones from your dad's house? she asks "Last time I heard, they'd all been picked up by the shelter. They were kinda groggy from something they'd ingested but otherwise they're just fine. "
Relieved, William slumps back onto his chair. "Oh,OK, good "he says" finding all at once that it's hard to keep his eyelids from drooping. He forces his eyes wide open.
Liz laughs, "OK kiddo, let's get you to bed. You want to share with me? You could sleep over the covers in a sleeping bag. Or do you want to sleep on the couch?"
"The couch" says William suddenly shy.
Liz laughs again. " Such the little gentleman. OK then, let me get you a sleeping bag and a pillow and you'll be all set.

Settled on the couch, William watches as Liz tidies the room and turns off lights.
"I'll leave the bathroom light on and the door open for you. OK?" she says.
"OK" said William, "thanks."
"That's OK sweetie." Liz stands next to the couch looking down at the boy.
'He really is a beautiful child 'she thinks,' *and now his chances for leading a normal life are pretty much shit*.'
She forces a cheerfulness she does not feel into her voice "Goodnight" she smiles," call me if you need anything."
"Uh hummm" agrees William, feeling her pain, but too drowsy to care why or where it comes from.
He is asleep in thirty seconds.

Hannibal pulls up to the mansion's roundabout driveway and parks. It is early afternoon, and the air shimmers with humidity. He checks Will and determines he still has a minimum of an hour before his friend begins to come out of his sedated sleep. He decides to momentarily leave Will in the car while he assesses his shoulder injury inside the house. In a manner of moments, his supplies are gathered and he begins his exam.
'Not so bad' Hannibal thinks, able to ignore the pain slicing through his whole left side. He removes the tourniquet and probes around the wound's opening. He hums a Bach fugue as he injects himself in the hip with a pain killer and antibiotic before disinfecting the area. He's confident he can manage the suturing himself, but if he runs into problems, he'll request Bedelia's assistance; she is never far away.
After applying a local anesthetic Hannibal begins to carefully suture his wound. As he works, he keeps an eye on the kitchen clock. Fifteen minutes have passed since he'd left Will in the car; time to check on him.
Hannibal finds Will still unresponsive but flushed. Hannibal decides that the car's interior is now too hot for safety, so once again, he slings Will over his good shoulder and brings him into the living room. He places Will on the couch then removes his jacket, shoes and socks before recommencing his suturing. He plans to give himself some morphia for the pain, but wants Will to be secured upstairs before administering it. Hannibal intends to secrete Will in the upstairs guestroom keeping him sedated and hydrated for a few days to allow himself more time for his own recooperation. Then, Hannibal surmises, he can begin the delicate and longed-for process of plumbing the depths of Will's mind.

Hannibal's lips curve upwards as he watches Will sigh in his sleep; lips parted, cheeks flushed, curls damp with sweat matted against the sides of his face. Softly, Hannibal moves the sweaty curls off Will's forehead. To Hannibal's surprise and pleasure, Will leans into the touch.

Hannibal's eyes shine in the darkened room, lips pursed, head cocked; he is now deep in contemplative thought.
Until this moment, Hannibal had never foreseen how tempted he would be in securing a physical relationship with Will in their new, shared life.

Hannibal appreciates beauty in all its forms, and masculine beauty was no different; yet it was Will's friendship and empathy which Hannibal has craved since the day he met him in Jack Crawford's office.

Now, with Will before him, sex, in all it's forms seems a real possiblity; just another manner in which Hannibal may consume Will Graham,and Hannibal is willing to accept as much of, or as little of, physical affection Will was willing to bestow upon him.

'Will never ceases to amaze' Hannibal thinks as, emboldened, he gently strokes Will's check. Tantalizingly, Will sighs and stirs. Hannibal then allows his fingers to travel down the white column of Will's throat, drawn toward the faint fluttering of his pulse. Hannibal wonders, if under deep hypnosis and the influence of drugs, Will will admit to sexual fantasies about himself. For practical reasons, and Hannibal considers himself eminently practical, a sexual relationship with Hannibal makes good mental and physical sense for his friend. Absently, stroking Will's scruff, Hannibal wonders what kind of lover Will Graham would make; the thought produces a warm feeling throughout his extremities, and he bends to gently to kiss the unconscious lips. Whether that kind of physical love ever comes to fruition, Hannibal thinks as he slings Will over his shoulder, he knows that their life together will be nothing short of glorious and
sublime.

Chapter End Notes

Your kudos gets a bite of grilled cheese before William scarfs it all. Your comments get to snuggle with Will in the guest room.

If anyone can tell me why the end notes from the previous chapter are still showing up...I'd appreciate the help!

Muskrat Farm-Two months prior

Chapter Summary

Mason reads TattleCrime and Cordell is introduced.

Chapter Notes

I hope Mason doesn't come of as too OOC; his insanity became my insanity.
WARNING: Mason is a child abuser, that is canon, therefore abuse is asumed, but not described. Also, William will not be molested at any time in this story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Cordell", Mason Verger has returned from his hydrotherapy with an appetite. "I'm ready for lunch now."

Dr. Cordell Doemling, the newest addition to Mason's staff is Mason's own personal medical assistant and therefore responsible for all his physical needs. But, it was Cordell's illicit propensities toward children which had endeared him to Mason, thereby securing him this well paid job at Muskrat Farm. Mason finds in Cordell, not only a sound doctor, but also someone who enthusiastically and creatively supports his proclivities with children.

That, and Cordell serves-up a heavenly "Dirty Tear" martini.

"*Fucking, 'To Catch a Predator*", Mason thinks as he's helped from his hydraulic wheelchair and settled comfortably into bed, *'that program has made my life a whole lot harder. Not like the good old days at Papa's summer camp*.'

Mason is busy feeling sorry for himself as Cordell bustles around; arranging his reading shelf and adjusting his laptop to allow for the perfect angle. He soon brightens however, when Cordell plates his lunch and pours the wine.
Between bites, respectively administered by Cordell, Mason scrolls through the internet, relying on voice activated software; in spite of intensive therapy, none of his limbs are reliable.

Mason likes to call the incident which rendered him paralyzed and bedridden, "my recent unpleasantness." The world at large believes his injuries were sustained by falling into his own swine's pen; the net-net being a broken neck and a face ripped to shreds by hungry pigs.

Truth is stranger than fiction.

Mason's current medical condition was the direct result of Hannibal Lecter's actions.

Hannibal, after escaping from a trap set by Mason, had returned the compliment by forcibly taking Mason on a field trip to Will's home in Wolf Trap. After dosing Mason with Psilocybin mushrooms and PCP, Hannibal had suggested to the young man that he might enjoy slicing his own face off with 'Papa's knife.' Giggling, Mason had agreed; sawing and hacking pieces of himself off, and then serving them, sashimi style, to members of Will Graham's pack.

Hungry, after his exertions, Mason had gone on to eat his own nose, chomping it down with abandon while Hannibal and Will watched, nonplussed.
Not content with Mason's self mutilation, Hannibal had broken the man's neck before finally contacting Margot Verger and telling her where she could find her brother.

When Mason woke-up in the hospital, days later, Margot was on hand to explain what had happened. "Cut off my nose to spite my face, huh?" Mason had joked while in a morphine induced haze. Margot had smiled one of her wintery smiles and left him alone with his tubes, respirators, and endless skin grafts; she had many reasons to hate her brother and hoped his sufferings would prove to be agonizing and profound.

But, that was many months ago, and Mason, armed with a new-ish 'face' and a 'can do ' attitude was ready for a non-health related undertaking; the locating, artistic torture, and eventual murder of Hannibal Lecter.

Rather an odd duck before his 'accident', Mason was now certifiably insane.

After his father's death, years before, Mason had discovered that he had inherited both his father's fortune and his Yankee ingenuity; bankrolling corrupt district attorneys, assemblymen, and senators has become a practice Mason excels in.
He plans to utilize his government contacts in his pursuit of Hannibal. However, Mason has an inkling that the private sector , with the incentive of five million dollars, will prove to be the more effective one at capturing his prize.

Mason has finished lunch now and is perusing Tattlecrime .com for the latest article written by "Baltimore's Favorite Ginger Journalist", aka Freddie Lounds.

Back in the days when he still had a functioning body, Mason had harbored fantasies about Freddie Lounds, ones in which muzzles, Catholic school girl uniforms, and chili infused chocolate played a prominent role. Now, however, he has to be content to read Freddie's fiery brand of 'mind-fuckery' journalism, rather than enjoying the real McCoy.

"Hellooo", Mason says, eyes glued to his computer.

Mason's voice has a cadence to it which prompts Cordell to look up from his task of stocking the mini fridge.

"What... do ...we... have... here?" Mason says then reads aloud "Crack-pot FBI profiler discovers illegitimate son in aftermath of grisly murder."
Mason absorbs himself in the article. When he reaches its end he sighs contentedly.

"Cordell, remember that strange FBI agent I told you about? The one who was so pally with Hannibal Lecter?"

"You mean Will Graham?" asks Cordell as he closes the fridge door.

"That's the one" Mason hums his approval " Well, it turns out he's something of a swordsman" Mason's googly eyes seek out Cordell's, " looks can be deceiving Cordell, remember that in your dealings with this wicked world. Anyway, it appears that my baby sister isn't the only dumb bunny to be impregnated by Mr. Graham. This article claims that ten years ago he sired another little sperm-ling; but unlike Margot's spawn, this one made it all the way out of the gate."

Mason takes another pull of wine, " According to Ms. Lounds, this kid's mother was murdered by, " Mason references the article again, "a known hit man with probable links to Hannibal Lecter."

Cordell's "hmmm" was polite but unfocused; he is busy on his laptop, scrolling through confidential files of local foster children; likely candidates for Mason's brand of hospitality.

"Now what do you think of that Cordell?"

If Mason's face could have expressed emotion, it would have been astonishment.

Cordell, closes his laptop, stands, and waits, the model of an attentive employee.

" It means my good man, that our favorite cannibal is on the move. I wouldn't be surprised if he's planning a little surprise visit to old Willy, and... what's the brat's name?," a quick glance at the screen provides Mason with his answer" ' William Wyse, now a ward of the state of Georgia.'

" Georgia, Cordell! " Mason's eyes gleam with manic glee, "Home of cheese straws, Pogo the Opossum , and now , Will Graham's son."

Mason pauses to reflect. "Hmmm, with Will Graham as his dad, this kid is going to need a lotta help. That asshole couldn't parent his way out of a paper sack."

Cordell self- consciously shifts where he stands; just thinking about a kid like William is causing him to swallow a few times.

"Cordell, find out everything you can about our young friend. If we're lucky, he'll be available to come for little visit. Maybe we'll have his daddy come along too."

Mason lies back against his pillows; his head is feeling heavy; he thinks he may have overtaxed his limited strength.

"I'm tired now " he says to Cordell who swiftly and competently adjusts the tubes, bags, and machines which Mason depends upon.

After the room's lights are dimmed, only the blue and red indicator lights of the machinery remain. Mason's face, in this low light, is a grotesque mix of beauty and the macabre. His

eyes, large and shimmering are a shade of cerulean, found only in tropical waters. Yet, if one were to lower their gaze from their depths, they would be met with a cruel mockery of a human face. Below his mutilated nose, lies a patchwork of skin and muscles, twisted, gnarled and still shiny with new skin. Mason no longer holds out hope that his periodic reconstructive surgeries will ever succeed in making him look "normal." He recalls how, fresh from the hospital, Margot's first words to him had been,' *how fitting, dear brother, now your outside's match your insides'*, and how his wheezing laughter had filled the room.

Mason has long since passed through the traditional stages of grief. He stands, now, at the threshold of his own, final stage; revenge.

"Thank you Cordell", he says, "you know, I've had my doubts, but, I do believe this is going to be a wonderful fall after all."

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will come in a week or so, things are geting tricky so I want to make certain my story's continuity is solid.
Your kudos trips Cordell as he walks by, making him drop Mason's martini.
Your comments make Mason's computer system crash; wiping out all his files.

A Dark Adapted Eye

Chapter Summary

William sees Jack Crawford again.

Chapter Notes

angst!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

William is dreaming.
He is standing in a stream with his dad getting a fishing lesson. He has just cast his line when he notices that he is suddenly alone. "Dad?!" he calls. He looks in all directions and sees his father, already on the shore, walking away. "Dad?!" William repeats, "wait for me." He begins to panic when he finds he's somehow forgotten how to walk. He leans toward the shore hoping his body's weight will help his progress.
Nothing.
"DADDY!!!!" William is screaming, crying in his dream, and his real life 'squeak' wakes him up. The viscous water holding him in place turns out to be a sleeping bag, and he tears at it in an effort to free himself. Sitting up, he stares around the room; in his panic he doesn't recognize where this is. He is about to jump up, when he hears a loud knock at the front door directly next to his head. A sound from a nearby bedroom tells him someone has been roused and is getting up to answer the door; Liz.
William releases his breath
'Liz. That's right, this is her apartment,' William remembers. *'Dad is gone. John is dead.*'
William leans back against the cushions.

Liz is scrambling, trying to hurry to the door while pulling on a hoodie. She sees William's expression and frowns a little, "Are you alright, honey? It's just an FBI agent, he texted me last night and said he'd be by first thing in the morning."

She goes to the door and looks through the peep hole. William thinks she must trust whom she's seeing because she opens the door; he notices however, that she's left the chain on.

"May I see some ID sir? "she asks politely.
A large, dark hand passes a leather badge holder through the crack. Liz examines the photo ID card and returns it. She unchains the door and swings it open.

"Good morning Agent Crawford" she says, "he's right in here."

Jack Crawford strides into the small apartment; he looks incredibly huge standing there. William gawks.

"Hi there William" he smiles. William solemnly stares at him before his eyes slide away and down to the ground.

"Would you like some coffee, Mr. Crawford?" Liz asks, "I have a press, it'll just takes a couple minutes."

"I'd love some, thank you says Jack," black, if I may" he adds, looking around for a place to sit down.

"Sorry about the mess," Liz said, "Just clear a spot anywhere."

Jack moves a stack of LSAT prep books to the ground and sits down on the emptied chair. He and William regard one another for a long moment.

" William, he says finally, " I'm sorry for your loss, I truly am".

William is thrown by this statement. "What do you mean?" he asks, " do you mean John or do you mean my dad?"

"Both I suppose," Jack says, "both were good men."

"Are," corrects William. "Both are still are good men, and only one is dead." he says.

When Jack doesn't respond, William's empathy provides him with a possible reason; something has changed in the way Jack feels about his father.
William glances at Liz , who is silently watching from the kitchenette; she attempts a weak smile, William doesn't return it. He looks back at Jack.
Jack's impression of William is evolving as well; his gut is telling him that there is more to this kid than meets the eye, but he's not certain whether it's due to trauma or something innate to William himself.

"OK William, you're probably right about that" says Jack placatingly, taking William's measure. "I mean, after all, you were there, and saw what happened. " He adds. He waits before continuing, just in case William has something to say. William chooses to remain silent.

' *Almost as if he's hiding something'*, thinks Jack.

"Now, I've already read the statement you've given to the police here," Jack gives Liz a nod of acknowledgement," but what I still need from you is to return to Baltimore and give an official statement for the FBI. The more details you can give us, the better chance we have of finding ...Dr. ...your dad." he says, catching himself, grateful, suddenly for the distraction of the steaming cup Liz is handing him.
"Thank you" he tells her.

If William had been a cat, his tail would have been lashing; when he speaks, his expression is one of pure contempt.

" You don't really care what happens to my dad do you? " he rasps.

Jack's eye brow's quirk at William's sudden outburst. He purposely keeps his cup raised to his lips, blowing on the hot liquid, watching William over its rim. What he sees concerns him. The play of emotions crossing the boy's face is eerily similar to how Will Graham would look back when his mind was breaking down.

'He looks like Will did when he was in prison' thinks Jack and the thought scares him more than he cares to admit.

William, seething on the couch, is suddenly presented with an image in his mind of his dad, dressed in orange, sitting in a jail cell; Will's face is nearly unrecognizable, like a mask.

"You should have been protecting him! "William yells, frightened by what he's been shown. "But you didn't, did you?! We didn't even have a detail at the house." He is horrified to feel tears welling up.

Jack looks down at his hands, his fingers are clutching the cup, he forces them to relax before looking back up into William's face.

" Why!? " continues, William, " was it because he was your bait? Was it because WE were your bait just so you could catch Hannibal Lecter?" William is trying and failing to control his tremors; he hates showing Jack any weakness. He can't believe he ever liked this man.
" You just wanted to catch Hannibal; but now he's gone and my dad's gone too." he hisses and stands up to leave; where to, he has no idea.

Jack grabs William's shoulder, not roughly, but firmly, and holds him in place. The two are essentially eye to eye now; a chihuahua menacing a mastiff.
"This is all your fault Mr. Crawford." William says, trying to push Jack's hand off.

Jack's face is calm, but a muscle in his jaw clenches. "I'm sorry you feel that way William." His dark eyes search the boy in front of him before pushing William gently back down to the couch. Trembling, William allows himself to be seated, but his expression remains murderous.

"William, I need you to calm down and listen very carefully. Jack glances at Liz, her concern is evident too. He waits until he feels William has relaxed enough to pay attention.

"What!?" William's tone is just this side of insolent.

Jack's looks sad but resigned. "Your dad didn't have a police detail because he refused one."

He waits for this detail to sink in; but when it does, William remains unimpressed.

"So!? that didn't mean you couldn't have given us one anyway!" William argues.

Jack raises one hand and drops it heavily down again; his only tell of his growing frustration. He leans forward. William reacts to his movement and moves backwards; Jack ignores the boy's rudeness.

" We believe he refused a police guard in order to make his departure with Dr. Lecter easier." Jack says.

The room is suddenly, deathly still.
William's gaze looses focus; his eyes dart from Jack's face to the door, to Jack's face again, his brain's two hemispheres working to tease out the meaning behind the words.

"William", Jack tries again, and this time his voice is apologetic, " It is the FBI's opinion that Will... your dad... wanted to go with Dr. Lecter; he wasn't forced to go with him... he chose."

William feels the sensation of cold water drenching his body.

Even with all that has happened, he has never known what true betrayal feels like until this moment.

Jack is staring at him.

'Your dad... wanted to go with Dr. Lecter.'

No

"William" from a long distance away, someone is calling his name. He ignores them.

'Your dad... wanted to go with Dr. Lecter.'

'That would mean he doesn't want to be with you.' his mind taunts.

' *I don't believe that, I can't believe that.*' he pleads with himself.

William's eyes seek Jack, "He was drugged" he whispers.

"Maybe he was," Jack looks at William "or... maybe he was just pretending."

William sees again his father's body, a dead weight he is pulling from a car; it smacks onto the road with a solid 'thump'.
' *I don't think you should have done that*.' Hannibal had scolded William, "*You may have injured him."*

*"*He wasn't pretending Mr. Crawford. Hannibal drugged him and put him in the car." William has no doubts about what he saw.

Jack sighs, but doesn't bother explaining that the FBI has already gathered a significant amount of evidence indicating Will and Hannibal were planning a rendezvous.

"Your dad was not a well man, William. It's not completely his fault. We just underestimated Hannibal's control over him. None of us saw this coming. I'm sorry." Jack places his cup down and folds his hands.

William feels as though his mind is cracking, fracturing, like an iceberg calving.

"*Did dad chose*?" William thinks; his stomach twisting into knots.

No

' *I know who my dad is*.' William thinks,' *and he isn't friends with a murderer*.'

' *And now you know who Jack Crawford is too'* his mind adds, *'he's someone who can't be trusted*.'

"Son? " Jack is still concerned by the boy's response; he hopes he hasn't saddled William with too much, too soon.

'*Son*', repeats William bitterly to himself; Jack's address seems to him to be intentionally mocking.

William bites down hard on the inside of his cheek, he needs to feels a physical reminder that he is still in his body; his tongue finds the hot slick of blood and tastes it's coppery tang .

"*What's happening to me*? he panics.

"*Nothing bad*,' his mind soothes,' *you're just getting stronger, and smarter. You want to find your dad don't you*?'

'*Yes*, 'William replies.

'OK then, just do what I do and we'll all be fine."

William smiles.

"*Ready?"* asks his mind.

"*Ready"* William agrees.

"So... we need to go back to Baltimore? William asks Jack as though none of this has happened and he hasn't a care in the world.

William's rapid 'about face' causes Jack to do a slow blink before responding.

"Yes, that's right. But... I'm concerned about you William, are you feeling alright ?" Jack looks doubtful.

"I'm fine,' William fibs, " I just want to get back to Baltimore as soon as possible so I can help you find my dad." William attempts what he hopes is a look of wide eyed innocence.

William stands up, turning to the young woman "Bye Liz, thanks for letting me stay here." he pauses, " Oh, and thanks for the grilled cheese too." William smiles disingenuously, nodding his head for emphasis so his curls bounce.

"Goodbye William, " Liz says, but her eyes are sad. William feels guilty fo a moment, but quickly quells it.

"Take care of yourself" she says," maybe you can let me know how you're doing? Text me every once in a while? Mr. Crawford has my number."

"Sure!" chirps William, opening the door for Jack.

"See you later!" he adds waving goodbye.

He hopes he never sees her again.

Chapter End Notes

Quick vote. Was Will in on it? The answer comes next; a Will and Hannibal reunion.

Your kudos gets William a Fosters Freeze dipped cone on the drive to Baltimore
Your comments get me to edit the next chapter more quickly.

Reunion at Wolf Trap

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal meet again.

Chapter Notes

All you authors out there, take my advice and NEVER, write a prequel unless you have already planned it out. Continuity is a bitch!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

En route to Maryland

William and Jack are driving country roads to get to the highway.

"Mr. Crawford" William begins, "I know we're in a hurry but..." he pauses and waits for Jack to glance his way.

"Could we go to Target on the way there?" William finishes.

"Mm hmm" Jack agrees, "but may I ask why?"

'*Because,* thinks William '*I need a smart phone, and the sooner, the better*.'

But because he knows Jack is already suspicious, William doesn't voice this aloud; it's time to ease up on his new persona.

William drops his eyes, the shy ten year old once more. "It's just that I really don't want to walk around the FBI wearing ladies' yoga pants . " he says, pretending to be bashful, " That and I really need some underwear."

'Don't worry, his mind' encourages him, *'You can always work the phone in later; say you want to text Liz ; just make something up.'*

Jack chuckles but his eyes are wary, "Sure William," he says looking sideways at the boy, " we can make that happen."

Wolf Trap, two days before

"Will, when are we going to eat?" William asks.

Will internally winces when William calls him 'Will'. Logically, he knows it's too soon to expect William to call him 'Dad', but sometimes, like now, being called by his first name blindsides him; he feels John's scrutiny and pity.

"I'll start the coals in half an hour so come back then." he says, playing it off. He's comforted as he watches William and his pack scrabble out the front door. The sight of his dogs and his son together never fails to make him feel he can do this; be a good father to William.

"He's a good kid, remarks John,' Lottie did a great job raising him,"

"She did" agrees Will, finishing his first beer. "I've killed this , do you want another?" he asks, walking to the fridge and rooting around.

John takes a long pull of beer before answering, "Sure, I could go for another." He accepts the bottle Will hands him and waits until Will is sitting down again before continuing," Will...I'm not someone who tells another man how to live his life," he begins when Will interrupts.

"I didn't know about William until after Lottie's murder" Will says, cutting him off.

"Oh, OK", says John, embarrassed. "Sorry to bring it up, it's just that..." He takes another pull, wrestling with how he's going to say what he's going to say next.

"Let me guess," says Will trying, but not succeeding, in keeping peevish anger out of his voice. "You're just not sure if I'm a proper guardian for William." He takes a quick swallow and points the bottle at John for emphasize " sound about right, John? "

John purposely keeps his gaze fixed on the fireplace before replying. "Hey man, " John sighs" that's not what I'm saying. " He looks Will square in the face." The thing is Nancy and I, and our girls, would be happy to have William come live with us." When he sees Will tense up, he hurriedly qualifies his statement.

" I'm just putting it out there. " he says, bringing his bottle up like a toast, " I won't say anything to William, but I promised Nancy I would bring it up." he takes a swig.

Back home, before meeting Will, it had made infinite sense to John that William should be folded into his own family. Nancy especially ,had been adamant that William would be better off with them, rather than with a man with such a sordid past. Pair that, with the threat of possible contact with Hannibal Lecter; no brainer, William belonged with them. But sitting here now, in the man's home, John's no longer sure. He sees how happy William is, and Will seems like such a nice, normal guy; John feels like a piece of shit just bringing it up. He watches as Will sits back in his seat, jaw working.

Their conversation is put on hold by the sound of the front door opening; William is coming back inside.

"William,' Will says, not bothering to look around."This isn't a good time." he stops because John is chuckling.

"It's not William, Will" says John.

Will's stomach drops away.

Will whips around to see not William, but a strange man standing in the door way; tall and lean and dressed casually in jeans, a plaid jacket, trucker hat , and thin leather gloves.
John stands up to greet, whom he assumes is Will's country neighbor dropping in for an informal chat.

'This fellow is lucky', John thinks, ' *pull something like this in Philly, and he'd get a bullet for his trouble*.'

John's good humor fuels his smile as he walks toward the man with friendly ease, hand outstretched, "Hi," I'm John Morrison, good to meet you."

"Good afternoon," the man politely replies, his clipped, foreign accent a strange contrast with his attire; he does not accept John's proffered hand.

Instead, Hannibal Lecter closes the front door.

"Hello Will" Hannibal says, ignoring the other man in the room. "Are you ready?"

John looks back at Will and then at Hannibal, "Are you going somewhere, Will?" he asks, puzzled.

"Will?" Hannibal's voice cuts through the room like a scalpel.

John's expression hardens, he looks at Will for an explanation.

"Would you and your friend please get down on the floor with your hands in front where I can see them? " says Hannibal.

"William" says Will, but it is barely a whisper.
"Will?"Says John at the same time.

"William is in the woods with the dogs," says Hannibal, looking first at Will and then at John" but if either of you are unable to follow my directions, I believe I could find room in my trunk for him."

"What the fuck!?!" says John, the cop in him now, fully activated.

"Sir", John is appraising Hannibal," we're not going to have any trouble here, OK? " he says calmly, he looks at Will and is surprised by the man's frightened expression; then he looks back to Hannibal, " Now, what I would like you to do, is turn around, face the door there, lace

your fingers together, and put your hands over your head." he pauses and adds, " Are you carrying any weapons? "
" Will?" John gives the man another chance to assist, " do you have anything we can secure him with if he gets to be a problem?"

Hannibal has waited politely, during John's speech, but makes no move to obey his orders.

M "No... John, I believe it is?" Hannibal replies, "That is not what will be happening today. Please get onto the ground with your hands where I can see them. Either do what I ask, or I will kill you."

John snorts. Scoffing, he looks to Will, only to watch in disbelief as Will gets down on the floor with his hands in front of him.

"Will! "John yells, have you forgotten the first damn..." John stops because Hannibal is suddenly behind him. John automatically brings his chin down, attempting to grab the fingers wrapping around his neck. John is strong enough to snag a few, when he feels Hannibal suddenly shift.

"NO." yells Will, but it is too late.

John is staring down at his chest which has a four inch skinning knife sticking out of it.

John gasps and grabs the handle.

"I wouldn't remove that John" advises, Hannibal, " If you do, you will bleed out before you can seek medical treatment." Hannibal is lying, he knows he has damaged a major artery.

John's lungs will be filling with blood very shortly.

John staggers forwards, grapples with, and opens the front door and disappears from view.

"William", John shouts as he clears the porch. Will hears gravel crunching under John's faltering steps, then another cry, this one strangled and chocking as John falls to his knees. John is drowning on dry land.

Keeping his attention on Will, Hannibal walks back to the door, looks outside, then closes, and locks it. "Now Will," Hannibal is pulling a capped syringe, from his pocket. He begins to walk back to where Will has raised himself to a standing position. " I am going to administer a sedative to you and then we will begin our journey."

"'Our journey' Hannibal?" Will is measuring his distance from the door while scanning his surroundings for the nearest heavy object; his gun lock box is too far away; he reminds himself not to panic.

"Hannibal" Will finds his voice, " you need to leave...now."

Hannibal looks apologetic as he taps, and squirts the syringe. "I am sorry Will if my past actions have created mistrust between us. Everything I did was done out of necessity, not malice."

"Necessity?" Will says in disbelief; he has spotted a bottle next to the chair in front of him; he grabs and smashes it against the solid wood leg of the chair. The bottom half breaks away, creating a jagged, weapon.

"Get out." he repeats.

Incredibly, Hannibal doesn't launch a sudden attack. Instead, he walks slowly around the chair; *'Here we go round the mulberry bush*,' thinks Will as he mirrors Hannibal's movements, keeping the armchair between them.

" Please remain calm Will," Hannibal says, "it won't help matters if you fight; we don't want William to come back while we're still here." With the syringe in one hand, Hannibal begins to pull something out of his other pocket.

'*Fuck*' thinks Will watching the movement, *'that can't be good*.'

Will looks beyond Hannibal, as though he has seen someone, "William!!" he shouts.

Though Hannibal doesn't turn, his slight hesitation is all Will needs; with all his strength, Will pushes the chair into Hannibal's legs, knocking him backwards. Jagged bottle in hand, Will runs toward the door, but before he will can throw the lock, he hears a sharp 'twap' of a taser, feels a stinging sensation on his back, and drops, limbs seizing.

Will lies, curled on his side, trying to remember the mechanics of breathing when, through his haze of pain, he sees Hannibal's shoes beside him.

Helpless, Will can do nothing, as Hannibal unbuckles his belt, loosens his slacks, and pulls them down together with his boxers,exposing a hip.

'"No" he tries to protest, but his teeth are clamped tight from the electricity that continues to surge through his clinched muscles; all that comes out is a muted grunt.

"Shhh, Hannibal soothes" I would not like to have to administer another dose, especially with your history of seizures. "

Will feels the cold sting of alcohol and jerks in response.

"Ne, ne, ne, ne, ne "Hannibal's admonishes in his native tongue, speaking quickly and quietly under his breath. Will feels a strong hand pushing down on his hip, forcing him to stay still. Then Will feels the sharp jab of a needle and a burning sensation as the plunger is pushed down all the way. Finally, Will is released.

"Just sleep now', says Hannibal. He is tempted to inspect Will's scar but stops himself; there will be time for that later. He feels Will's skull for contusions and finds none; the fall had been heavy, but it appears his shoulder took the brunt of it.

'*Good*', thinks Hannibal.

Will feels his pants pulled back up, his fly re-zippered, and his belt buckled. He is already drifting, falling into the velvet darkness of sedated sleep; fingers are gently touching his

wrist, taking his pulse.

"William." Will slurs, his eyes are too heavy to raise.

"Just sleep now," the voice is getting further and further away. " sleep, and when you wake up, I promise, everything will be better."

Will is asleep.

Hannibal moves swiftly around Will's small house planting just the perfect amount of evidence for law enforcement, and Jack Crawford in particular to find. Hannibal smiles. He has already hacked Will's accounts and emails creating a cyber breadcrumb trail for hungry FBI agents to follow. Hannibal manipulates Will's floppy hands so he may leave his fingerprints on various documents and items; some he will leave here, some he will plant at various locations meant to represent their 'scent trail.'
He wonders where the boy is and whether he was alerted by John's cry.

'Hmm, no matter' , Hannibal thinks, he will cross that bridge when, and if, he gets to it.

Hannibal leaves the house, glancing down without interest, as he passes John's corpse. He pulls his car into the driveway, carries Will to it, and settles him onto the floor of the backseat.
Hannibal is already back in his car, turning onto the street to leave when he remembers something; he meant to leave Lottie's letter where William could find it, a final parting gift. Hannibal is parking the car on the side of the road when he hears what must be William running into the front yard. Hannibal hears the sound of violent retching.

'He has seen John' Hannibal deduces, and walks up the driveway to hand deliver the letter instead.

William is crouched over John, his small body heaving from the effort of vomiting.

"Well, young man." says Hannibal, amused. Seeing William here, like this, he's tempted now to take the boy along, it could ..."

Hannibal's thoughts are cut short when William aims a handgun at him and fires.

Chapter End Notes

ha,ha Hannibal you smug SOB.
Your kudos makes Hannibal's car run out of gas.
Your comments make John a zombie who will eat Hannibal's brains.

Day 1: Hannibal's home: Virginia

Chapter Summary

Will dreams. Hannibal enjoys bathing his friend.

Chapter Notes

I love Hannigraham, but I have no idea of how to write it...please be kind, or better yet, write the sex for me!!!

on an unrelated note, after writing about baths, I really wish I could take one but nix to that, severe drought...no baths in my horizon.
please excuse poor editing, sometimes you just gotta push the birdie out of the nest.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Bud" , Will Graham hears his father's voice in the darkness, "you'ns still comin' with me then?"

"Yes, Daddy," Bud answers, instantly awake. He is seven years old and is going to go 'night' fishing with his daddy for the first time.

"Alrighty then, let's getta move on. " Francis 'Frank' Graham replies. Frank's accent is noticeably thicker whenever he's tired or stressed, as it is currently 4AM, the first condition certainly applies.

Bud rolls off his bed and stands up. From his spot on the rug, Bud's dog Hambone raises an interested head for a moment before flopping back down again. Bud laughs," 'Lazybones' should be your name," he says affectionately, rubbing the dog's side with a bare foot,"

"Bud," his dad's voice is more insistent this time, "stop messing with that dog and come along if your fix'n to go, times a wasting."

"Alright Daddy", Bud calls. He hurriedly rips off his pajama's short pants and grabs a pair of worn jeans off the floor. Bud toes his bare feet into his sneakers and goes to look for a shirt in his dresser. He debates whether to just wear his night time undershirt but decides against it.

'Daddy wouldn't like it if I do that', he thinks,' *if those old cats round the First Baptist saw me, they'd say it shows he's not given me a proper Christian upbringing; just cuz mama's not*

around.' Reluctantly, he chooses a plaid button up, a relic from the church barrel, out of the drawer and finishes dressing.

Hambone watches approvingly from his spot and jumps up to follow as soon as Bud leaves the room.

Bud finds his father in the kitchen, drinking a cup of coffee by the light of single bulb. Bud pours himself a glass of milk and selects a couple cold corn pone muffins left over from last night's dinner. Bud can't remember ever being up at this time, except for the times he's awoken after nightmares. The night is pitch black, not even the birds are stirring yet; it feels like the world is holding its breath, waiting for something to happen.

"Ready then son?" his father asks.

"Ready Daddy" Bud agrees, rinsing his glass and putting it into the sink. "Are we bringing anything to eat whiles we're out there?" he asks .

Frank runs his hand over his scruff , 'scritch,scritch', and looks around the kitchen. ' Hadn't a planned on that" he says, looking down at his son, "but if'ns you wanna pack a bite to bring, do it. Jus' make it quick."

Frank walks out of the kitchen, screen door snapping behind him. Bud can hear him in out in the car port rummaging through his fishing equipment.

Bud grabs a couple more muffins , a bottle opener, and two bottles of Cheerwine, one for him and one for his dad, from the icebox and stuffs them into his paperboy carrier sack. He meets his father out by their '67 Ford pickup truck.

Frank distributes the rods and buckets between them and they walk down the red earth path together; Hambone zig zagging ahead of them.

"I recollect when I was your age" Frank says, looking down at his son, "my daddy used to say to me, "Bubba, you'ns must have a hollow leg , cuz you'ns a scrawny little fella but you can pack it in like a teamster, " Bud and Frank laugh together as they walk out through their side yard. Bud swings the fish bucket back and forth, imaging his father as a little boy in overalls, stomping through a pasture with a hollow leg filled with grits and okra. After another minute, Bud and his father reach the tall grass that leads out to the river where Frank's boat is moored. Bud's sneakers and jeans are soaked after only three steps into the grass, but he doesn't care; he's with his dog and his daddy and they're all going fishing.

In Will Graham's dream, Frank reaches down and smoothes his son's hair back from his forehead. Will leans into his father's touch, relishing the feel of warm, work-roughened hands against his skin.

Standing over Will in a darkened room of his lakeside house, Hannibal is pleasantly surprised as Will nuzzles his hand as he strokes his curls. Hannibal smiles as he gently moves from Will's curls to his check, stroking its scruff as Will stirs and sighs. Suppressing his own sighs, Hannibal pulls Will up to a sitting position from the couch has been laid upon, and then

brings him up onto his shoulder. Slowly, and stopping for frequent breaks, Hannibal carries Will up the flight of stairs to the guest bedroom.

The hospital bed has already been prepared, the sheets smooth and cool ,a light summer blanket appealingly folded down. He places Will on the bed then examines him for signs of wakefulness. Will is on the cusp of regaining consciousness, his sleep light, his limbs stirring. Hannibal prepares another syringe of sedative and gives Will half a dose. Then he enters the powder room and runs the water for a bath.

Will's tenancy here signals a new beginning, Hannibal postulates, and therefore, his ablutions should mirror that. Hannibal sprinkles a liberal amount of bath salts into the tub before stripping himself down to his boxers. His ugly clothes, so useful for blending in, are separated and placed into their proper hampers. He wraps a towel around himself and returns to Will. Carefully, he cuts Will's soiled clothes away with trauma shears and deposits them into a waiting trash bag.

Finally, and at long last, he is presented with the image he has imagined and sketched, but has never seen; Will's nude body laid out before him.

His forces his eyes to start at the feet, working their way up slender but muscled legs, past the damp curly patch of pubic hair, pausing to clinically examine the size and shape of Will's genitals before moving up to his stomach; Hannibal's breath hitches. The scar, *his scar*, is long, raised. and an angry purple-red. It begins at Will's right external obliques and runs across his rectus abdominis muscles; it is beautiful.

Hannibal recalls, the night of his betrayal, hugging Will tight against his body after having gutted him with a linoleum knife. Will had clutched him like a frightened child as his wound poured hot blood, threatening to spill forth his viscera onto the kitchen floor.

Hannibal suddenly feels lighted headed, the effect, he believes of his injury, and leans against the foot of the bed until his vertigo passes.

With gentle, reverent fingers he recommences Will's examination. He traces his scar from its beginning, and follows its course across the man's torso. Hannibal must swallow a few times when he thinks about Will's warm organs, so close to the surface of his skin, pulsing with blood and life. Hannibal's fingers feather their way up to Will's shoulder, caressing the scar left from Jack's bullet. Watching for signs of reaction, Hannibal gently touches Will's arms and shoulders, checking for injuries before rolling Will onto his side and checking the marks left by the tasers's probes. The flesh around their puncture marks is red and inflamed; Hannibal makes a note to monitor the spot for possible future infection.

However, other than his own and Jack's handiwork, Will's body presents a creamy surface; all soft planes and defined muscles. Hannibal experiences another episode of vertigo, more severe than the last and seats himself next to Will until it passes. Thoughtfully, he reaches a decision and walks to the master suite and picks up his cordless phone. He dials a number and finds he only has to wait one ring, before the person on the other end picks up.

"Hello Hannibal, "Bedelia greets him. "What can I do for you?"

After a brief conversation, Hannibal replaces the phone on its charger and returns to Will's room. Bedelia was scheduled to arrive in two hours, plenty of time, Hannibal thinks, to bathe Will and settle him into his new environment.

He hefts Will up, and carries him into the bathroom. Hannibal thinks longingly of a hot, soaking bath with his friend, but, with his shoulder injury, he decides not to risk it. Sighing for the lost opportunity, Hannibal deposits Will into the tub and begins the process of washing every inch of his body. He stops only to drain and refill the bath when it is time to shampoo Will's hair and he takes his time with this pleasant task. Finally, Will is clean enough for Hannibal and the water is drained for the last time.

'Will smells exactly as he should', thinks Hannibal; no more dog dander, or stale sweat, or the bitter stink of fear pheromones. Will's scent now, as he lies warm and flushed in the emptying bath is as pure and sweet as a fresh autumn apple.

Hannibal is purring with contentment as he wraps Will in an oversized towel and carries him to the bed where he carefully dries him. Next, Hannibal addresses the medical care Will will need for the next few days; he inserts a catheter, IVs for hydration fluid, and secures a NG feeding tube into Will's nose. All of these tasks take more than an hour, leaving Hannibal's whole body shaking from fatigue. He rests briefly before securing Will's arms and legs with the loosest setting the restraints allow and stands back; admiring his handiwork.

'*Beautiful*', thinks Hannibal, deciding not to cover any part of Will as he lies. Hannibal adjusts the room's temperature settings then closes, and locks the door.

He returns to his room dressing quickly and with a mind toward comfort before making his way down to the kitchen. Bedelia would be arriving soon for a few days stay in the detached guest unit. Though she would not be allowed to see Will, Hannibal feels better knowing she would be near should Hannibal experience medical complications from his wound. He runs though his stocks of provisions and decides they should suffice, taking into account that Will would be subsisting on Vivonex for the next few days.

Briefly he thinks about Jack and his team, playing catch up as they find and interpret the evidence he has left. He gleefully imagines Jack's superiors, growing more and more severe with him as one red herring after another leads to dead ends.

'Jack is no longer a young man,' Hannibal thinks, as he prepares for Bedelia's arrival, *'maybe, this will be the straw that breaks the agent's back*.' Hannibal chuckles at his mild joke while he froths the milk; Bedelia loves his cappuccinos.

Chapter End Notes

I've said it before and I'll say it again, I want Will to have had a happy childhood!! Sorry if that is not canon but this story is all over the map anyway.
Francis was my grandfather's name and he was called 'Bud', who knows why.

Trailing Clouds of Glory

Chapter Summary

William meets Bella and sends Freddie Lounds a text.

Chapter Notes

I wanted to say 'thank you ' to everyone who reads, kudos, and comments. Thanks for taking the time, especially with questions or suggestions, it all helps the process.

exuse grammer, I can't remember all the rules any longer.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day One: Hannibal's guest room, Virginia

Will feels the solidity of his body before he realizes he is waking. He is lying down, he thinks,on a bed. His body remembers he is upset about something, but his brain's cognitive functions aren't fully working. His daddy? He was fishing with his daddy, is that why he was upset? Before Will's sluggish brain can puzzle it out any further, he feels a small jab on his arm, *'a horsefly?*', he thinks, *the river is lousy with them'* ; a warm velvet wave curls around him and he is asleep once more.

En Route to FBI headquarters

William and Jack are crossing the state line into Maryland. William is dressed in proper boy's clothes now; busy programming the smart phone Jack Crawford has bought him.

"I'd like to be able to text Liz,"William had said when broaching the topic in the store. "I'll need a laptop for school too," says William as they drive along.

"Oh really!?"says Jack "since when do ten year olds need a laptop for school?"

"Mr. Crawford, you don't have kids," William helpfully explains, "we need computers these days. We have to check our teacher's websites and grades, and do our homework on them. Besides, using computers at the library is a pain" William glances sideways at Jack, "there are always creepers in there hogging up the terminals, looking at porn."

Jack laughs incredulously. He is struggling with his suspicions about William. He wonders if William's experiences during the kidnapping have triggered a personality disorder dormant until now. He remembers his own dark days, when he believed Will Graham was a serial

killer, hidden in plain sight; then the moment he discovered Hannibal actually *was* a serial killer. Unconsciously, he rubs the scar on his neck left from his attack.

William, close by, and observant, notes the movement and smirks inwardly.

The safest plan, Jack thinks, is to keep William close and petition the family court for *guardian ad litum* so he would have access to William's medical records and care. Out of the corner of his eye, he watches William, nose just a few inches away from the screen of his smart phone, and sighs.

'Maybe, thinks Jack, '*William can come live with us, and then I can request temporary guardianship.'*

Jack plans on speaking with Bella's pallitive care team; if they think its advisable, he can install William as a member of his household.

'There's certainly enough room to add one small boy' thinks Jack. Yet even with all his training and insight, Jack stills feels out of his depth caring for such a young child. '*Maybe*, he thinks, 'I *need to get another opinion before making any rash, long term decisions*.'

He'll have to make a few calls once they get back to the office.

Baltimore State Hospital For The Criminally Insane, Fredrick Chilton's office, One Week Later

"You say he's showing signs of disassociating?" Fredrick Chilton is sitting in his office, reviewing Jack's report concerning William.

"I believe so, yes", answers Jack, Chilton's eyes fly down the typed page, he glances up at Jack.

" And he's demonstrating manipulative behaviors? "

"Very much so, yes." says Jack.

"Hmmp," smirks Chilton, "The apple hasn't fallen very far from the tree has it? Will was outrageously rude when I offered him the chance to... " he frowns when he realizes something, "It is rather remarkable the similarities between father and son,considering he was raised by his mother. How long was the boy in Will's care?"

"Only two weeks," says Jack, looking regretful.

"That little, huh? " Chilton says dryly, " That *is* remarkable." his disapproval is evident as he makes a notation "Well, Jack, I can speak with him, if you like, but if what you're telling me is true, I doubt he'll trust me enough to tell me any version of the truth."

"I'd appreciate whatever insight you can give me Dr. Chilton. School is starting in a month and I would like for William to be settled enough to be able to start attending."

"Is he going to the public school in your neighborhood?"asks Chilton, but in a dismissive manner, already looking at this watch. The look isn't lost on Jack who smiles at Chilton's disinterestedness.

"No, there's a small, private school one of Bella's friends runs. I can drive William there on my way to work, or hopefully, he'll be able to take a bus to campus."

"Jack", Chilton, in a rare display of consideration of others, is looking skeptically at Jack,"you still think it's wise to have William live with you considering Bella's condition?"

Jack takes a moment, pretending to take Chilton's objection into consideration; the truth is, he has already made his decision.

" Yes I do, Fredrick. The few times I get to see William act as though he is actually a ten year old is when he's with my wife."

Jack gets up from his seat and offers Chilton a good bye handshake,

"He's taken to reading to her in the afternoons" he adds, smiling.

Chilton sniffs, "Hmm...well keep an eye on that one Jack, if he's anything like his father, he'll turn out to be a weaselly SOB." Chilton consults his tablet " Let's say Wednesday next week, 2PM for my appointment with William?"

Jack nods "Thank you for your time Dr. Chilton, we'll be there."

. _____

The Crawford residence, Maryland

It was true, William did like Bella. From the very first time he held her thin, cool hand in his he was smitten. It wasn't just due to her warm eyes and smile, he thought, it was because she knows what suffering is, and can see yours too; being with Bella makes William feel less alone.

"It's a pleasure to meet you William," Bella had said when Jack took him to meet her for the first time.

Her smile, warm and lovely, lit up her dark chocolate eyes; just her attention alone him made him feel like he mattered.

"It's nice to meet you too Mrs. Crawford, " said William holding the fragile hand lightly in his own, and in doing so, seeing how she cries only at night when Jack wasn't around to hear.

The image makes William's vision blur with tears and he quickly looks away.

Seeing his tears, but not understanding why they were triggered, Bella seeks to distract the boy. She raises her head from her pillow a little, dark eyes sparkling with fun and laughs, a low, throaty chuckle.

"You know, William" she says eyeing the boy thoughtfully "you share the name of one of my favorite poets."

At his position by the foot of the bed, Jack shifts, watching her face, drinking in every feature.

Interested, William's gaze returns to her; he has heard this before, especially from teachers.

"William Shakespeare." he says in a sad, resigned voice.

Jack smiles.

"'No," Bella contradicts, sharing a quick smile with Jack and laughing at the boy's surprise, "'William Woodsworth'" she says looking to Jack as he stands at the foot of her bed; his expression unreadable.

"Remember?" she says, her eyes soft from the memory, "the book you bought me in that little shop, after we missed our train?"

"Yes, I do" Jack says, smiling down at her; pain mixing with love in a red hot torrent.
He forces his smile to remain wide and calm.

Jack's pain hits William like a physical blow; he looks away, giving the couple their privacy.

'He's not your friend' his mind warns him '*don't you feel sorry for him*.'

William glances doubtfully at Jack, a man, trying so hard to comfort his dying wife without words,

'He doesn't care what happens to your dad.' he is reminded by a sing song voice.

William feels a scowl beginning to form before he remembers where he was, and who he was with; he smooths his expression into one of shy understanding.

"Do you still have the book?" he asks Bella.

Bella's eyes turn to him once again, "I think we probably do, don't you think Jack?"

Jack nods his affirmation and adds, "If it were anywhere, it would be in the library downstairs." he says.

"The big one with your desk?" asks William. He has been told not to go into that room without permission so naturally he's been dying to see it ever since.

"That would be the one" Jack agrees knowingly, wondering if William snoops around when Jack isn't at home; he will have to begin locking doors when he leaves for the day.

"Would you like me to get it for you?" William asks Bella, " I could read it until dinner is ready" he looks to Jack for approval.

"Sure", Jack says, "Why don't we look for it together." he gives Bella a tender smile, " but after all these years, I'm sure it will be like looking for a needle in the haystack."

It ends up taking William two days of scrounging through the Crawford's large library before he finds it; the small, insignificant book Bella remembers so fondly. William looks to see if Jack has noticed his discovery, but Jack is absorbed in an email. William decides not to say anything ...just yet. Moving his position so he is behind Jack's back, literally and figuratively, William opens the cover to read the inscription on its flyleaf:

To my Bella

She was a phantom of delight

When first she gleamed upon my sight;

A lovely Apparition, sent

To be a moment's ornament;

Her eyes as stars of Twilight fair;

Like Twilight's, too, her dusky,hair

With all my love, Jack

William slams the cover shut, chews his thumb nail, and thinks.

"I found it Mr. Crawford" says William, holding up the book.

Jack takes off his glasses and smiles "Well I'll be, good man, you found it."

"Can I bring it up to Mrs. Crawford?" William asks.

"Sure," says Jack," just make sure you knock first and ask the nurse if now is a good time." His face looks suddenly old and tired.

"Ok" says William, tugged in two directions seeing Jack's distress; comfort or condemnation?

He's saved from his inner dilemma by Jack himself, who gives him a quick, dismissive nod and turns back to his email; a tip from Florida has come in, placing Hannibal and Will near Boca Raton.

William watches him for a few moments before he leaves the library and runs up the stairs. At the landing, he opens his phone's email and composes a quick message to the address he memorized so long ago, while still back at the group home.

flounds@tattlecrime.net

dEr freddie

f U wnt 2 knO bout wot

rly hapnd w hannibal lecter,

email me

i M d william wyse U hav RitN bout.

ps i M staying w agent jack crawford of d fbi.

f U teL him i'm talkin 2 you, i wiL go somwher Ls w my story.

SEND

_____

When William's knock results in a soft "come in", he sticks his head into the door. The day nurse is just finishing injecting something into Bella's IV, William flinches, the smell of death is strong.

"I found the book" he says, waving it a little, "but I can come back if you're tired, or..." William doesn't say 'dying' but that is the word that's popped into his head.

He wonders if he should just slip away; he would be able to check his email that way. Bella smiles a ' thank you' to the nurse then wearily turns her head towards him; the morphine is starting to relax her.

"It's alright William," she smiles beatifically at him "come in, I can't believe you found it after all this time", her gentle eyes, shadowed by pain linger on his face. She reaches out one hand as though to touch the cover. William places it in her hand and she touches the leather as tenderly as though it were her lover's face; William sees Jack, younger, thinner, and softer.

"'No," she says handing it back to him," you hold it."

Her smile brightens, " How about if I recite a poem and you see if you can find it and follow along" she says.

"OK"' says William, doubtfully," if you can do that."

Bella laughs, but her eyes are already closing, 'I think I can still manage it' she says ironically.

Eyes closed, she begins to recite:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;

The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,

She pauses to allow William time to find the poem in the book. In the silence, William realizes suddenly that he has been watching her, neglecting the book. Hurridly, he scrambles to open it as one of Bella's eyes open questioningly to see what he's up to.

"Wait a second," William says, face flaming, as he scans the index. Bella smiles and closes her eye, she hears the boy flipping through the pages, softly muttering to himself.

"Is it from "Ode on Intimations of Immortality... " William asks, stumbling over the hard words.

'Yes," Bella says and gifts him with a smile full of warmth and approval. "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" recites Bella smiling at William's bemused expression. "It's quite the mouthful isn't it William?"

William smile is genuine as he looks up the poem in the index and finds the page it is on.

"Stanza 59", Bella adds.

"Ready" he says.

"Let's say it together now" says Bella. She rests her hot head back on her pillow and closes her eyes. Her rich contralto mixes with William's pure treble as they recite together:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;

The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,

Hath had elsewhere its setting,

And cometh from afar;

Not in entire forgetfulness,

William pauses, listening to the words, cascading like music through the quiet room. Bella smiles, allowing him the moment before softly prompting him,

"And not in utter nakedness,..."

William finds the spot again and reads with her

And not in utter nakedness,

But trailing clouds of glory do we come

From God who is our home:

William stops and looks at Bella. "Do you believe that?" he asks her, not bothering to calculate which face he is showing her so urgent is his need to know.

"Do I believe what?" Bella asks, her smooth forehead creased.

"Do you believe that God is our home?" ask William and holds his breath for her answer.

"Yes I do William," she smiles, radiant as an angel, he thinks.

"Do you?" Bella turns her face toward the boy who has lost so much, so soon.

William sees his mother's corpse atop a lake of her own blood, John's unseeing eyes, the rancher's nose less face, and his own father's unresponsive face wetted by William's hot tears.

His eyes are wide and guileless as he looks straight into Bellas' "I do too." he says, lying.

"Well good then, " says Bella tilting her head back against the hollow of her pillow. "William," she says, eyes closed again, " I think I'm going to take a little rest now, alright? But I would like it if you would read to me again tomorrow; just like we did today?"

"Alright," said William and puts the book carefully on Bella's bedside table. "Goodnight" he says walking quickly out of the room, closing the door behind him.

Before the latch had completely clicked shut, he was checking his email.

1 New Message

William runs to the guest room where he is staying and hurriedly shuts the door.

William, f U R hu U sA U are,

MEt me @ d ltl K9 park on yor st.

2moro @ 2PM.

cum aloN.

b aware, i M alwys armed.

FL

Chapter End Notes

William's poetic encounter with Bella was pretty much a rip off from a scene in one of my fav books "The Great Gilly Hopkins"

If anyone needs a translation of the text messages here they are:

dear freddie if you want to know about what really happened with hannibal lecter, email me. i am the william wyse you have written about. ps i am staying with agent jack crawford of the fbi. if you tell him i'm talking to you, i will go somewhere else with my story.

William, if you are who you say you are, meet me at the little dog park on your street tomorrow at 2PM. come alone. be aware, i am always armed. FL

Day 3: Hannibal's home in Virginia

Chapter Summary

Will wakes up and speaks with Hannibal. Bedelia remembers being raped.-Warning-

Chapter Notes

WARNING...I am going off canon here, not AU, but in this chapter Hannibal's rape of Bedelia is described as a flashback.

Bryan Fuller once answered a question about the difference between Mads characterization of Hannibal vs. Tony Hopkin's version and he said that Hannibal in post Red Dragon was freer, more feral if you will, than when he was a free man in Baltimore ie Mad's depiction of Hannibal.

So, I took this concept and ran with it a little, thinking that Hannibal, though a superman in many respects, is after all human, and would be affected, in his own way, after the events which ended Season 2.

For those of you who would like to skip the rape, I have put a ----RAPE----------caution tape where the scene begins and an ------It's Over--------- where its safe to go back in the water.
I don't take the subject of rape lightly, but I was exploring a side to Hannibal which was stirred up directly after his escape to Paris; a nightmare he experienced there which triggered his attack of Bedelia.

I don't think Bedelia deserves to be raped for helping Hannibal, I just think it was a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

However, I wanted to, in my own way, flesh out , Bedelia's role in all of this. Many fan fics have Hannibal kill her off after Season 2, so I thought "what would Bedelia's life be like if she were to live" she is after all, a fairly normal person caught up in extraordinary circumstances. She is also the person who brings William back to Will at the end of "Patatino" so I see her as a sympathetic character whose association with Hannibal forces her walk a shaky tightrope.

Day 3: Hannibal's house, Virginia

Will's awareness is like a bubble; it floats up to the surface of consciousness until finally, 'pop'. He is awake. It takes effort, but he manages to peer through half- open eyelids. The fog clears a bit when he panicky realizes , *'I can't feel my arms and legs*.'

'No, wait, he tells himself, *'I can feel them, but they are being held immobile*.'

His eyes are now wide and staring. He sees that he is on a hospital bed, but in a room whose lighting is muted and bluish in tint, unlike any hospital lighting he's ever experienced in the past.
He turns his head slightly to the left; the side of the bed is corralled by a tangle of IVs hanging from a pole. Some tubes lead down to his arm, one disappears under the bed clothes; his arm is restrained at the wrist. He slowly turns his head to the right, and sees his right arm is similarly restrained.
He looks left again, peering beyond the medical equipment to see a door several yards away. He examines the room; the walls are tastefully papered and covered in framed art and bookshelves.

'Not a hospital,' he thinks, *'not a flashback, this is happening in real time but where am I*?'

He tests his arm restraints, *tug*, *tug*; they hold fast.

He tests his leg restraints, *tug, tug*, and sees his feet, covered by a light blanket wiggle in response.

His adrenaline is spiking, driving his breathing to become faster and more shallow; the effects of the drug he's been given is wearing off.

"Hello!?" he calls, realizing how completely helpless he is immobilized like this.

He continues his task of self inventory; his nose feels numb and sensitive. By rubbing the side of his face against his pillow, he feels what he hypothesizes is a feeding tube inserted into his left nostril.

Downstairs, Hannibal is aware of Will's wakefulness. He has set up a system of vital sign monitors, live video stream and flat screen TVs in his bedroom, kitchen and den. When it appears to Hannibal that Will is truly awake and working himself into a panic attack, Hannibal leaves his meal preparation and goes to check on him.

Will hears the 'click' of a lock and watches, breathless, as the door swings open. When Hannibal enters the room, Will's frail hope for a happy ending to his situation is extinguished forever.

Hannibal is dressed casually, in a pair of khaki slacks, and white button up oxford. Will stares as Hannibal walks up to his side with well remembered fluidity.

"Good afternoon Will." Hannibal's eyes glimmer in the half light as he stops to check the various IV bags and lines.

"How are you feeling? "he adds, turning his full attention onto Will.

Will feels how dry his throat is, and that his lips, are cracked and taut.

"Hannibal" is all he croaks out.

Hannibal places a large, warm, palm onto Will's forehead; Will, flinches. Hannibal's response to Will's reaction is not repressed as it might have been in the past. Rather, Hannibal's anger shows on his face now; a narrowing of his eyes and mouth He purposely keeps his hand on Will's skin; a show of dominance. Finally, with one last smooth to Will's warm head, he removes his hand and says, "You are running a low grade fever."

He moves to a table laden with medical supplies and selects an ear thermometer.

"Hold still please" he says, but doesn't wait for compliance, rather, he holds Will's forehead as the inserts the probe into his ear.

Will feels like a young child visiting a doctor's office and the image elicits his next rasping utterance .

"William" he says, pushing his head against Hannibal's hand in an attempt to see his captor's face.

Will's movements have invalidated the thermometer's reading and Hannibal is forced to reset the thermometer and try again.

"This device works more efficiently when you remain still Will" Hannibal chides, and his grip on Will's head this time is vice-like.
Will winces at the pressure but complies until he hears the 'beep' signaling the temperature has been recorded.

Hannibal examines the thermometer's screen" Hmm. 101F." He returns the device back to the table then walks back to Will's side; smiling , no, grinning, as though he is well pleased. "Not bad at all Will, I am glad." he says.

"Where is William?" Will repeats, this time with more heat, his hands unconsciously forming fists.

Hannibal cocks his head, a quirk Will has seen before, but here, under these conditions Will feels a shiver of fear.

"Will," Hannibal's voice is different now, Will reflects, its more...roguish, teasing, "You are recovering from a traumatic event, as am I. I will allow you to ask me exactly two questions before I insist you rest." he waits, expecting Will to rail against his terms.

Surprisingly, Will doesn't, only silently considering his options before asking, "Where is William?"

'*Good*,' thinks Hannibal, *'one down, one to go*.'

"William is in Baltimore" Hannibal replies.

"What are you going to do with me?" was Will's last allotted question.

Hannibal's smile was startling in its brightness; Will feels a wave of nostalgia for the 'old Hannibal' half smirks.

"We are going to have conversations Will, just as we used to." he says.

"Now, rest." Hannibal says in a tone which brooks no argument and he walks away, opening and shutting the door behind him without another word.

Will hears the 'snick' as the door is locked and he is alone once more.

'*Rest*?' thinks Will who is feeling wider awake by the moment. Instead of complying with Hannibal's dictate, he's determined to take stock of his situation; pushing hard against his rising panic.

'Fucking keep it together, he admonishes himself attempting a sense of normalcy by making a mental list:

1. William is in Baltimore.

Will's empathy tells him that Hannibal has not killed William; theoretically to ensure Will's cooperation. Still, he worries what happened the day he was taken and if William is alright. Tears of helpless rage well hotly when he thinks of how he and his son have been used for Hannibal's amusement. Hate for Hannibal, and an overwhelming sense of protectiveness for William clouds Will's thinking for several minutes. To soothe himself, he allows his imagination free reign; he sees images of himself murdering Hannibal again and again. Eventually, his rage cools and he can return to his mental list:

2. He is being held in a private home, large, if this room is any indication and two storied; he had glimpsed a railing through the open door.

3. Based on his physical discomfort, he has been sedated for two, three days tops. He examines the types of fluids he sees dangling ; including a nearly full bag of urine.

Will grimaces at the sight but continues with his list making; it helps quell his fear.

5. The labels of the IV bags are all in English, which, he fervently hopes, means he is still in North America.

4. He appears to be naked. Will looks at his chest, arm and hands; everything appears clean and trimmed. Will frowns. He wishes he could see his own reflection because he believes even his hair has been cut short, and most shockingly, his beard and mustache seem to be missing.

Will is simultaneously furious and embarrassed. He can't believe Hannibal would do something like this; trim his hair and make him clean shaven while he was sedated. Will sniffs; his hair smells freshly shampooed as well. This last thought makes Will blush and twitch from mortification. Rationally, he understands that Hannibal, has seen naked bodies in all conditions, his mind flashes to the victims of the human mural; a big mistake because in his weakened state, his empathy has the power to sweep him up and tumble him through vision after vision.

Will blinks.

He is laid out inside an oversized bathtub, his nude, flushed body covered by scented water . He looks up, to see Hannibal, leaning over him, hair falling forward from his forehead, sleeves rolled up to the elbow, a saturnine smile on his lips holding a washcloth which he takes and...*Fucking hell*. Blanching, Will forces his mind away from this scenario, biting his lip to clear his head. The sharp jab of pain jars him back to himself and he forces himself to take a some deep, calming breathes; he signs shakily and continues with his assessment.

4. Hannibal was injured, relying heavily on his right arm.

Will strains to remember the events which led him here. What *had* happened exactly ? Was he the one, he fervently hoped, who had given Hannibal his injury? Had Hannibal been shot, stabbed?

Will tries every technique for memory retrieval in the book, but all he can remember is being at his home in Wolf Trap with William, and then waking in this room.

He turns his head and feels a dull ache at the back of his skull. A bump of some kind, throbbing with pain; *'add a possible concussion to the list'* he thinks and wonders what Hannibal's end game is in all of this.

All the Chesapeake Ripper tableaus, and his own lifetime's worth of nightmares, come rushing into his mind. He thinks of Abel Gideon, strapped to a gurney, sliced into hunks like a human meatloaf. Will gasps and tries to think of something more pleasant, but naturally, his brain supplies him with an image of Miriam Lass, imprisoned for *two years*, brainwashed, arm hacked off like a length of salami. *'No, don't think of Miriam, don't think of Gideon*, ***don't think of meat'*** he admonishes himself as his heart rate soars.

Downstairs, pouring homemade stock into jars, Hannibal frowns as he hears Will's heart rate monitor beep. He waits for a few minutes hoping the man will settle, but when it remains at 160 bpms , he ascends the stairs once again.

Will's head snaps to the left at the sound of the door opening, hoping to catch a glimpse of the house beyond it.

"Hannibal" he says, but Hannibal ignores him completely, carrying with him a vial of clear liquid from which he fills a syringe.

"Hannibal, please" Will says, not above begging," Please just tell me why I'm here."

Hannibal raises the syringe to the IV intake tube and depresses the plunger.

Almost immediately, Will's muscles in his whole body feel softer, his eyes become heavy.

"No, Hannibal" Will moans, already knowing it will do no good.
"Please, let me stay... awake" but his words are slurred, his sentence floats, unfinished.

This time, Hannibal doesn't smile; he is angry and disappointed with his friend.

When Hannibal returns to the kitchen, his anger is evident; his entire body radiates with it.

From her position at the range, Bedelia eyes him curiously as she caramelizes shallots, but says nothing.

They each finish their relative duties in silence.

Finally, Hannibal speaks. "I am going to begin tomorrow" he tells Bedelia, placing his stock into the refrigerator. He doesn't elaborate but then, he doesn't have to; Bedelia knows exactly what he is referring to.

"Alright," she answers, " if none of my arguments have swayed you."

"They have not" he says as picks up his glass, scenting the wine.

"Very well Hannibal" she says, " My first plane leaves from Logan at four PM."

"You have everything you need for your journey? "Hannibal asks.

"Yes, I do, thank you. You were very...thorough" replies Bedelia.

Hannibal inclines his head in acknowledgement.

"Thank you for coming." he says.

'Not that you had any choice in the matter', the unspoken words are manifest,based on his posture, and in the way in which he barely glances in her direction.

They both know that Bedelia has made her deal with her particular devil and she dances ,whenever and however he demands.

She slowly walks past Hannibal, not wishing to draw his attention. When she is nearly out of the kitchen, she forces a smile saying, "Excuse me Hannibal. I believe I will begin my packing; that is, if you don't have need me for me right now?"

"No, that's fine, prudent in fact." says Hannibal, quartering potatoes, " I will call you when dinner is ready; it should be no longer than an hour."

She leaves him to his own thoughts, glancing at the video monitor on her way out of the kitchen; Will Graham's image is completely still.

Bedelia hurries to her quarters, '*escapes*' she thinks,enters and locks her door behind her. Leaning against its reassuring solidity, her control crumbles and she allows herself the release of of tears.
It had been a stress- filled three months, she thinks, culminating in a stress-filled three days here. She pushes away from the door but without vigor; her distress has drained her and she droops with exhaustion.

Like Will, Bedelia, had also seen a change in Hannibal; he was somehow freer, larger, in both his emotions and his reactions.

At first, sipping champagne with him on the flight to Paris, Bedelia had been charmed by the 'new' Hannibal; one whose smiles were bigger, laughter more playful. Bedelia had imagined Hannibal's new persona was closer to what he might have been as a young student. 'Maybe *I was naive*, she thinks, *not to have anticipated that the lighter side might also signify a lessening of self restraint.*"

_____RAPE SCENE_____
It happened on their first night in Paris. They had dinned pleasantly; laughing and swapping stories from their pasts. Hannibal's stories, had a sweet naturalness to them, as though he had thrown off a layer of disguise. Their dinner had ended, they had said their goodbyes, and retired to their separate, but adjoining hotel rooms.

It was early in the morning, well before dawn when Bedelia was roused by the sound of her door handle being rattled. Not, she quickly determined, the handle of her main door. Sitting up, she could plainly see from the window's light, the handle of the door which separated her room from Hannibal's moving; *'rattle, rattle*, pause, *'rattle, rattle*.'

"Hannibal" she had called gently, as she walked toward the door. The handle stopped its movement, and in the sudden quiet, she could hear what sounded like a body pressing against the door.

"Hannibal?" she tried again, fear spiking when she wondered who, if it wasn't Hannibal, the person could be.

"Open the door" a voice low, and guttural had sounded; Hannibal's voice.

She threw the latch and immediately the door was forcefully pushed open. Her gasp of shock was short lived because her throat was seized and squeezed. The next thing she saw, was the sight of her room rushing past her as she was pushed backwards and up against her bed.

Hannibal's hair, loosened during sleep was stuck against his skull in wet clumps; Bedelia smelt the fetid stink of night terror sweat.

"Hannibal", Bedelia tried, again but she was spun around and slammed onto her bed, her neck snapping upwards as her chin impacted with the mattress. Immediately, Hannibal was on top of her, pushing her night dress up, gripping her around her waist and bringing her hips upwards; she felt the hard press of his erection against her bare bottom.

"Stop!", Bedelia had yelled as loud as she could. The result of her outburst was an iron hand grabbing her head, turning it face down, and smashing it deep into the duvet. She thrashed violently, fighting for breath, panicking as she began to black out. Only when she stopped moving, did the hand leave her head and she turned it sideways, grateful for the cold, fresh air she gulped down in breath after breath.

She understood then, that she would be allowed to breath only so long as she remained compliant.

She waited, tensely, wondering if Hannibal intended to have anal sex with her and if it would hurt as much as she feared it would. She felt a shift in the mattress as Hannibal removed his pajama pants, kicking them off, and then two hands gripped her hips, and the press of his cock's tip was against her tail bone. Her grip on the bedding was instantaneously ripped away when he rammed his hard length into her; her small frame pushed along the sheets by the impact. Pain exploded in her body.

Desperately, Bedelia's mind sought relief, distraction, anything to make what was happening bearable. She tried to think as Hannibal's therapist, 'who *did he imagine he was anger fucking right now?" Will Graham? A person from his past who had hurt him*?"

Just when Bedelia felt she could no longer stand another moment, Hannibal thrust into her with all of his strength and she felt the hot flood of his cum sear her inner walls.

With a triumphant sounding grunt, Hannibal collapsed on top of her, his weight crushing. She wondered if it was truly over.

Finally, Hannibal pulled out and rolled off. Bedelia dared to look over her shoulder and watched as Hannibal picked up his pajama bottoms and left the room.

That had been nearly three months ago, Bedelia thinks, and it had taken nearly a month for her wounds to heal. Even the next few mornings in the hotel, when she had refused to answer his knocks, Hannibal never pressed, never brought up what had happened that night. Bedelia had used her own medical contacts when she sought treatment and was grateful that Hannibal never offered to examine her. Even now, she is not certain how much of the attack he remembered and how much he sublimated. Thankfully, nothing like it was ever repeated.

_____OK ITS DONE_____

In the days which directly followed, Bedelia wondered if what had occurred had been karmic payback for aiding and abetting Hannibal. He wasn't the only one with blood on his hands due to his escape. Bedelia felt like a flagellant, beating herself to atone for her sins. Still, every day she is relieved to be deemed important enough for Hannibal to kept alive. Even now, as a temporary house guest, she has been given permission to return to Paris on her own.

Bedelia tries not think about the young boy left motherless by a monster's whim, or the fate of his father, drugged and helpless, in the main house. She knows that they are just two of the countless people Hannibal will consume until he is stopped.

She impatiently wipes her tears and pulls her luggage from the closet; she needs to be busy with something so she no longer *thinks*. It works for a while, the process of emptying drawers and re-hanging clothes a soothing one. Her calm is broken, too soon however by the intercom's ring.

"Dinner is ready Dr. Du Maurier," Hannibal's voice sounds tinny, transmuted as it is through the speaker, but his tone comes through loud and clear, *'Come now, come whenever I call you, you are mine and always will be.'*

Great Minds Think Alike

Chapter Summary

William meets Freddie Lounds and Hannibal gaslights Will.

Chapter Notes

I realize that I am jumping around in time alot so I wanted to ask:

Should I stay with one story line per chapter or should I continue to have little story arcs throughout the chapter?

Either way is fine with me.

Comments, and critiques welcomed with open arms,

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dog Park, 1 block from Jack Crawford's home

Freddie Lounds, dressed in jeans and a navy blue peacoat pulls a stocking cap over her distinctive red curls. She has come to the designated meeting site, a local dog park, an hour earlier than the time her text message stated. She wants to see who this "William Wyse" could possibly be before 'they' see her; past events have conspired to make Freddie cautious.

With Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham together and free to roam, ("*Killer Duo Free to Roam*" had actually been one of her bylines) Freddie wasn't taking any risks.

She glances down at the pug she has borrowed from a neighbor; it snorts and looks up at her. "Come on" she tells it, and they begin walking the perimeter of the park, keeping close to trees and shrubs and peering into parked cars. The park is fairly well populated she notes, people are using their lunch hour to exercise their dogs and children are still out on summer break. As she rounds a corner of the iron fence, she encounters a boy, sitting with his back against a tree, watching her. She drinks in his appearance, already mapping out her next story. The boy has brown curly hair, spilling out from the sides of a stocking cap much too large for him. He stands, walks towards her then stops, leaving a good ten feet between them.

'*A young Will Graham'* , thinks Freddie, and she smiles involuntarily.

"Hello William" she says while attempting to pull back on the pug lunging forward, eager to make the boy's acquaintance. William's solemn face melts into one of happy pleasure as he kneels down, encouraging the dog's happy licks and wiggles with hugs and scratches.

Freddie glances around, wondering if this is a trap. "Are you alone?" she asks.

The boy looks up at her with surprise, "Who would I be with? You think this is some sort of a trap?" His expression of childlike happiness is replaced with scornful incredulity.

"Why are you here so early? The meeting isn't for another hour? "she demands, curious.

William gives the dog one last scratch before standing and meeting her gaze, "Why are *you* here so early? He counters.

"To scope out the area," she says, honestly, and without thinking.

William's smile lights up his face *'This kid is going to be a heart breaker'* thinks Freddie who grins back.

"Great minds..." Says William.

" Think alike" finishes Freddie, " Call me Freddie," she says holding her hand out to shake William's.

He takes it and gives it a strong shake; he knows can't trust this woman, not really. He wonders if she will ever trust him; he doubts it. He releases her hand never breaking eye contact.

'Hmmm, maybe not so much like his father,' thinks Freddie.

"I need your help Freddie." William says, coming straight to the point; Freddie can appreciate his efficiency.

"Sure kiddo", Freddie breezily promises," what do you need?"

William braces himself; this is the moment upon which his schemes are hinged. He looks up at her with his large, ocean blue eyes " I want you to become my legal guardian." he says.

'Oh shit!' thinks Freddie.

Day Five: Hannibal's home in Virginia

It has been two days since Bedelia's departure and Hannibal is well underway in his plan to modify Will Graham's mind. He had begun; stereotypically he admits, at the beginning, asking Will, under hypnosis to describe his earliest memories, and impressions. Sometimes

he utilized olfactory therapy to stimulate memories; lately he has been using a strobe to overwhelm Will's cognitive reasoning and plant false memories deep in his hippocampus.

When they had arrived at Will's memories of Lottie Wyse, Hannibal worked diligently to erase Will's memories of the young woman.

No Lottie equals no William, or so Hannibal theorized.

They had moved past Will's police academy days and into his years of police work leading up to his injury and first hospitalization. Hannibal was fascinated and could have spent hours manipulating Will's memories of this time, but he was on a schedule and forced himself to keep to it.

That night, Hannibal had taken Will, compliant from the drugs, back to the guest room and sat him down on his bed. Tired, Will had rested his head against Hannibal's stomach, just above his waist. Will's action wasn't sexual in nature, but Hannibal tensed, suddenly aware of Will's warm head and gentle breaths so close to his genitals. Slowly, he carded his fingers through Will's hair, missing the curls shorn for reason of practically, and slowly massaged Will's scalp with his long, strong fingers. Will moaned softly and leaned into the touch. From his position, Hannibal could see Will's eyelashes fluttering against his cheeks, flushed from pleasure.

He pushed Will down onto the bed and Will's eyes fluttered open, "Hannibal?" he said, brow knotting. The sensuality of the moment was gone, dispersed, as Will's mind struggled against the drug's effects.

Hannibal had inwardly cursed at the turn of events but smiled tenderly at Will as he maneuvered him onto the bed and gently buckled the restraints.

"Hannibal" Will tried again, "What is this, why are you strapping me down?"

Hannibal had stroked Will's forehead in a paternal fashion.

"Sleepwalking Will," he said, and moved to prepare Will's nighttime sedation."It's safer this way, I found you on the roof of your house a week ago, remember?"

Will had closed his eyes, attempting to sort through the jumble of impressions that came to mind.

"Yes," he finally answered," I was on the roof and the dogs were barking" he tensed suddenly,

"William" he asked," Is William alright? "

Hannibal frowned as he plunged the dose of sedative into Will's shoulder. Hannibal was increasingly frustrated that Will refused to give up his hold on William.

"Oh, Will" Hannibal said sorrowfully. He stroked Will's stubbly cheek, *'nearly time for another shave'*, he had thought.

"Don't you remember?" He watched the other man's puzzled eyes grow heavy from the drug.

"We've already had this discussion, many, many times." Hannibal bent to kiss the half conscious man.

"William is dead."

Chapter End Notes

so, what do you think? all this jumping back and forth, is it too confusing?

Perception

Chapter Summary

Hannibal manages to convince Will of an unhappy truth.

Chapter Notes

This chapter relies heavily on events/dialogue which took place in " Patatino". If you haven't read that work, this chapter may be confusing.

Note Italics are used for the following reasons: thoughts, flashbacks, and dreams.

This chapter really kicked my butt, so if there are things which don't make sense, please point them out to me!

And finally... "Seven more days till Halloween, Silver Shamrock!"

Day Six: Hannibal's House In Virginia

'Three, four, finish off the knot and you're ready.' says Will.

'Like this?' asks William.

'Yes. Now, let out some line.' says Will watching as William pulls some slack from his reel.

'Good, that's enough.' says Will. 'Keep your wrist stiff and your elbow close to your side.' He gently moves William's arm into the proper position. He watches as William whips his line, up, over, and away just as they had practiced.

'Perfect.' says Will, watching where the line lands, 'Your Grandpa would be proud.' He reaches over to give William's bobbing curls a quick pat but meets air. Will starts; he is no longer in the river but standing in a forest thicket. A hazy winter sun is barely strong enough to break through the stark trees surrounding him.

'William?' Will calls.

'Daddy!!' William's shrill voice echoes off the trees.

Pain clutches Will's chest, brutal in its strength. He wades through the underbrush, as brambles and vines catch at his body. Sweating and panting he breaks through to a clearing

and sees the Wendigo of his nightmares, crouching over William's prone body; the creature's razor sharp claws are stained crimson with bright, dripping blood.

'Oh my God," gasps Will, 'No!!!" Will rushes the monster who meets him half way in a coiled leap. Will's fists smashes into its obsidian hide; it's like slamming into granite. Grappling with the monster, Will sees that his sleeves have been shredded away; angry slash marks cover his arms and hands but he feels neither pain nor fear. He knocks the creature to the ground and grips it's antlers with his bloodied hands then kneels with all his weight on its throat. A keening cry rises from the creature and Will responds with a roar as he yanks its head sharply to the left. The snapping of the beast's vertebrae sounds like wintery bones breaking underfoot. Will releases the Wendigo's antlers; he hears it gasp as it slowly suffocates.

Will rushes to where William lies; attempting to sit up. 'Thank God,' says Will as he supports the small body in his arms.

William's head lolls back against Will, his eyes panicked.

Then Will notices what he hadn't before; William's belly has been slashed from one end to the other; his intestines glisten in the half light.

'Dad I'm so cold.'William says, tears streaming down his face, his breathing quick and labored.

'It's OK buddy, you're going to be OK' Will lies, shaking uncontrollably as he attempts to comfort his dying boy.

*"*Will? " *a figure is standing beside them in the woods.*

Will ignores the presence and clutches the boy more tightly.

"Will?Wake up Will!"

Suddenly, William convulses, coughing and gagging as gouts of blood burst from his nose and mouth. His glassy eyes are fixed on his father's face, begging and pleading for help.

Will is weeping, and thrashing when he hears, rather than feels the impact of a hard slap against his face.

"Will! Wake up."

Will gasps as he opens his eyes to see Hannibal, dressed in pajamas, leaning against his bedside.

"Get away from me you sick fuck!" Will yells, still in his nightmare.

Hannibal's face registers shocked distain.

"Calm yourself Will," he frowns at the writhing, weeping man," You have awoken from a nightmare, nothing more. Please, calm down."

Will glares at him, straining at his restraints, head raised as far off the bed as possible; he wishes he was close enough to bite.

"You told me William was dead!"Will says, his face a mask of snarling teeth and feral eyes.

Hannibal's breath hitches as he worships the image before him. He vows to sketch it as soon as he is done here: lock it into a padded room of his memory palace, tear a pig's throat out whilst feasting on this glorious visage.

Hannibal drops his eyes at Will's accusation and gently places his hand on Will's left shoulder. Will lunges, but Hannibal is quicker and avoids Will's snapping teeth by a fraction of an inch. He feels a jolt of arousal, as he moves his hand to the safer location of Will's wrist. He finds Will's pressure point and rubs with in an attempt to calm him.

"Yes, I did Will. I am sorry." Hannibal says.

"Sorry? Sorry for telling me? Or sorry he's dead?" Will asks but doesn't wait for an answer; Hannibal worries that Will is becoming hysterical.

"You were my friend Hannibal!" Will is crying, "We were friends! It wasn't enough to gut me? You had to kill Abigail?" Will's chest heaves as he gasps for breath.

His vital sign monitors are beeping and flashing.

"And then Lottie and now..." Will slams his head on the pillow again and again, " William too? Oh my God! " Will is inconsolable.

Impotent to help, Hannibal stands, steadily stroking Will's hand as the man weeps and rages. Until he met Will , Hannibal had never, experienced pain so intimately alongside someone he loves. It's too painful, he thinks, this feeling of vulnerability and helplessness. Hannibal delves further into his own feelings; he feels...chagrined. He resents that even with all his vast intellect and abilities he is impotent to end his friend's suffering.

It takes fifteen minutes, but eventually Will quiets. He swings his flushed face to Hannibal, who winces as though from a blow.

"You've taken everything." Will's voice is a monotone as fresh tears well up in his eyes.

Spellbound, Hannibal watches the process each tear undergoes as it gathers, pools, then spills down his friend's face; he resists the impulse to lick their downward path.

"Please...please, Hannibal, if our friendship ever meant anything to you, " Will's eyes have closed, the effort of keeping them open too great, "If you ever were my friend, please, please, just kill me now." Will shudders. " Whatever it is you're doing with me here, stop, just stop " he says, his voice faltering, unwittingly paraphrasing Bedelia.

Remorse, tinged with anger twists deep inside Hannibal's belly. His own eyes fill as he looks down at his friend. He can't understand why Will would plead for death rather than accept the gift of Hannibal's companionship.

Will's eyes are swollen and fiery red. Peering through lashes matted by tears he looks to see what effect, if any, his words have had. He sees Hannibal staring down at him, his own eyes flooded with unshed tears. Will holds his breath, wondering if, and when, death would now be delivered. Hannibal releases Will's hand, who is instantly grateful for the reprieve from physical contact. Listlessly he watches as Hannibal walks into his powder room. A few moments pass and Will hears the sound of running water. Then, Hannibal returns to his side with a damp washcloth and begins to bathe Will's fevered face.

"Will." Hannibal tries reasoning with his friend, as he folds and refolds the cloth, running it across Will's forehead. Will shudders, but otherwise allows Hannibal's ministrations. Pleased, Hannibal drags the soothing cloth across Will's checks and eyelids. *'Will is running too hot*,' Hannibal thinks; certainly degrees higher than the 101 F mark of yesterday.

"Please believe me my friend " Hannibal says " I did not kill your son. Why would I have brought him into your life, our lives, if I had only meant to kill him?"

Will's head jerks away at the mention of William, but his eyes remain on Hannibal. "Don't you dare say his name" he hisses, "You told me he was dead. What are you trying to say, that all three of us were going to be a family together? Like what you'd planned with Abigail, right before you slit her throat?" Through the miasma of drugs, fever, and adrenalin, Will is struggling to empathize with Hannibal; he needs to know the truth once and for all. Hannibal's hand stops it's comforting passage across Will's face.

"Regrettably Will, William is dead, but please rest assured that I had no part in his death." Hannibal's eyes shimmer with tears .

'Gator tears,' Will thinks scornfully.

" I wish I could have done more." Hannibal continues, " But by the time I reached him it was too late." Hannibal places the cloth on the bedside table. "I was also unable to help the man John."

Will grimaces.

" John?" he sneers, " Oh, of course. You killed John too, well why the hell not? Two for the price of one. " All the platitudes Will grew up hearing are flooding his mind now.

Will turns his head away from Hannibal saying, "Please, just end this Hannibal. Make your own 'three's a charm', and just end this."

Hannibal sighs and takes Will's hand again; Will jerks his hand, but restrained as he is there is nowhere for him to go.

"Do you remember anything that happened the last day we spent in Wolf Trap?" asks Hannibal frowning as he observes Will staring straight ahead; seemingly to completely ignore Hannibal.Hannibal sighs resignedly and continues." The man, John Morrison,visited our home, Will frowns, " Bringing items for William , including," Hannibal's finger's tighten on Will's wrist, "his mother's service pistol. Do you recollect any of this?" he asks.

Will's head jerks around and he stares at Hannibal. "Yes," he whispers, as an image presents itself; a gun, in a lock box. Will sees himself, sitting in his living room, tossing back beers with John, hearing John's voice as he scolds William '*...that is exactly why you should never shoot one without me or Will, because when you get cocky, you get careless, and that is how people get hurt. Guns are not toys.'*

Hannibal nods his approval, "Yes, well it appears the boy took the box into the woods behind your house and discovered the code to open it."

Will's eyes close again as he shakes his head, "No," he says, "That is not what happened. John and I were talking when you came into the room and..." Will stops because he is having a hard time remembering what had happened.

"Will," Hannibal's voice was surprising gentle," I had left your home for the duration of John's visit , and was waiting in my car five miles down the road in a deserted barn." Hannibal says. "When I came back early, it was only because you had texted me our signal. " Will stares at Hannibal like he has snakes for hair. "Apparently, you and John had found the boy, wounded, in the woods. I could tell that both of you had worked valiantly, but neither of you were able to stop the bleeding; a major artery had been severed and needed immediate clamping."

'Dad, I'm so cold' , Will hears in his head as tears begin to well once more. *'Was that a dream or a memory too painful for me to remember?'* Will thinks.

"No, no!" Will repeats, turning his head from side to side.

Hannibal waits.

Will is lost in his thoughts. He remembers John now, remembers the lock box with Lottie's gun, remembers...William. Will's head stops.

Hannibal smiles.

Will remembers now; William was holding the lock box...in Will's living room. Will's eyes open to see Hannibal standing just was he was before, eyes downcast, holding Will's hand with his strong fingers.

Hannibal's hooded eyes find Will's"You disassociated Will, you blamed John for William's death and your mind found a solution; you projected a persona onto John and killed him."

The Wendigo of his nightmares, crouching over William's prone body; the creature's keening cry as he breaks its neck.

'Jesus,' thinks Will, *'Could that have been John?'*

"No" says Will, "I didn't, I wouldn't." But his voice is uncertain.

Hannibal's sorrowful gaze slids downwards.

"Tell me Will." Hannibal says, " Is that not what occurred when you murdered Randall Tier? You believe you were killing a beast who was actually a man? Why then would you believe this situation to be any different?"asks Hannibal.

"Because Randal Tier was trying to kill me after you sicced him on me like a rabid dog." Will says.

"I'm sorry about William, Will." Hannibal repeats, " By the time I arrived, it was too late for either of them."

"By the time you arrived Hannibal?" says Will angrily, "You were five miles away, just waiting?"

"Yes" says Hannibal.

"You say you were staying at my home?" Will says incredulously, " You were actually living with William and me at that time?" Will feels he is on firmer ground here and his anger flares precipitously.

"Yes. " agrees Hannibal, " I had been with you for nearly two weeks; I came after you texted me our signal." he says. Hannibal watches intently, hoping that Will will finally come to grips with his story.

"' Our signal!?' "Will is getting tired of this game; it's getting more fantastical by the moment.

"You seem to think you are the only victim here Will." Hannibal scolds, "You are forgetting that William and I had bonded as well," he lies, "You weren't the only one who lost a son that day."

Hannibal's expression is so desolate, that Will almost falls for the act; almost being the operative word.

"Jesus, Hannibal " Will yells, "Are you so lacking in common decency that you're actually using my dead child's memory to convince me of all of this?" Will is pleased to see Hannibal stiffen from the insult and continues."None of this bullshit you're serving me makes sense Hannibal, but you know what does?"Will says unexpectedly.

Hannibal notes that every cord and vein in Will's neck is bulging as he pulls against his restraints.

Hannibal waits; hopeful. Will had been unspeakably rude to him, but he's optimistic that the man will soon redeem himself.

"Let me off of this bed and let's see how 'meant for each other' we really are. Man to man." Will snarls " Fight me. But let it be a fair fight." Will envisions beating Hannibal's face to a pulp. So visceral is the image, that he can hear Hannibal's aquiline nose snapping under his fists; feel Hannibal's hot blood splatter against his face.

Hannibal's breath stills; the thought of boxing and wrestling with Will until they both drop bloodied and exhausted is titillating. If he were to agree to Will's demand, Hannibal feels

certain that he could avoid irrevocably hurting Will; Will in turn would be prevented from doing any real damage to Hannibal.

"And what purpose would that serve? " Hannibal asks casually, his thumb halting its motion against Will's hand.

Will sees and feels the arousal his proposition has stirred in Hannibal and pauses; confused. Then his rage and disgust bubbles up and colors his reply, "It's purpose Dr. Lecter" he says, and Hannibal flinches at the raw loathing in Will's voice, "Would be so I can kill you, stand over your lifeless body as I lick your blood off my fists, then walk away from all this!" Will says, rather colorfully, Hannibal observes.

Hannibal's mouth twitches at this toothsome image.

"You say you're my friend? "Will says, " Then let's end this. Here. Now." Will attempts to imbue his demand with as much gravitas as possible. He is tired of being strapped to this bed; bathed and petted like a child, and all by a man whom he hates with every fiber in his being.

Hannibal moves his fingers to Will's pulse point with one hand as he smoothes the bedclothes with another. "The photo Will," Hannibal says, calmly switches gears, as though Will had never spoken; never offered to engage in a gladiatorial match to the death.

"Unbelievable." Will says in response to Hannibal's prevarication.

"'The photo of William's first fish," Hannibal continues, feeling the correspondent increase in Will's pulse as his friend makes a connection; Hannibal presses his advantage. "The photo I asked you to take. The one you texted to me." Will's face has gone from confused to murderous again.

" I never texted you a photo Hannibal and you know it." Will says.

Hannibal ignores him and presses on. "It was our signal for me to return to America. It meant you and William were together and ready for our trip,"Hannibal's eyes bore into Will, " When you sent it to me again the day John came, I knew something was wrong. I rushed back, only to find..." Hannibal's lashes are wet with tears, " you over the body of your, *our*, dead son." Hannibal waits for Will's reaction; Will has stiffened and is staring into space. " At my arrival, you warned me of a monster that you had just killed, or maybe only wounded. " Hannibal continues, " I looked and found John in your side yard; dead. I'm so sorry Will, I tried to save William, " Will jerks at the name, "But he had lost too much blood by that point..."

William on a forest floor, choking as gouts of blood burst from his nose and mouth.

'You know, William,' Will *had warned*, *'Hannibal Lecter is not your friend, no matter how he seems in his letters.'*

Will sees in his mind, William's large eyes staring at him owlishly when he replied , 'You seem jealous. Is that because he was your friend first but then he tried to kill you?'

'Hannibal hadn't killed Abigail,' Will thinks, 'He had kept her, waiting until the perfect time for the three of us to escape together.'

'Your own, rash actions, doomed whatever family structure you could have shared with Abigail.' Hannibal had written to him in his letter.

Will is becoming more and more distressed as his mind jockeys from one thing to the next; attempting to make connections.

'I didn't know what else to do' Abigail had told him, tears in her eyes, 'So I just did what he told me.'

Will's face is wet with tears.

Hannibal is completely absorbed watching the play of emotions flashing across Will's expressive face; he finds it morbidly delicious watching the man cannibalize his own memories in the attempt to suss out what is real and what is not.

'Really, Will an intelligent man such as yourself should not have to resort to mindless profanities.' Will remembers hearing these words, but when, where? '

'Sometimes Dr. Lecter, you really are a prick.'

' When did I say that?' thinks Will frantically.

"I was concerned about you Will.' Hannibal continues his story, "After William passed, you became catatonic. So I brought you here." Hannibal says watching Will's face."We were leaving soon in any event. I'm sorry it could not have been with William. I was trying, in my small way ,to rectify had happened to Abigail. "

'Well, perhaps I can agree with your sentiment, even if I don't approve of your delivery.' Hannibal's voice, in his head.

Will's lucidity was failing.

"You told me he was in Baltimore." Will whispers.

"Yes." Hannibal agrees, "The FBI claimed jurisdiction and came to collect..." he stops in an attempt to spare Will any further pain.

Will sees his son on an autopsy table; alone and forgotten.

' If only' he thought, 'my head wasn't so hot, and, Jesus, the pain...' Will winces from the image and his own, physical pain.

'So, my friend, why am I here? Is there something you need my assistance with?' Hannibal's hand is on his hot forehead.

"Oh my God" Will says out loud.

'Was that real?' Will panics, his thoughts twisting and squirming like eels.

' No...that had not been real.' he thinks.

'What about your camera?' Hannibal had asked as Will and William were heading out the door.

Hannibal had been standing in his living room.

Will gasps.

Hannibal had been in his living room the same time William had been with him.

'You would never forgive yourself if you missed documenting such an important milestone as your son's first catch.' Hannibal had said. Will had grabbed his phone in response, had snapped the photo of William with a fat river trout...

Hannibal has been speaking the truth.

Will seizes; his eyes rolling upwards, his back arching.

Hannibal breathes a heady sight of relief when he sees Will convulse. It had been touch and go there for a while, he concedes, as he strokes Will's head through his seizure. He must remember to obtain a mouth guard in the off chance Will decides to purposely bite his own tongue. Hopefully, Hannibal thinks, as Will's breathing finally slackens and his body relaxes, thoughts of suicide, if any, will quickly pass.

For the next half hour, Hannibal works to reduce Will's fever; bathing him in lukewarm water, and administrating liquid ibuprofen when Will is able to swallow again. Finally, Hannibal tucks Will in , kisses his friend's temple soothingly ,and tidies the room. Before he leaves, he checks Will one final time; his guest appears to be in a deep slumber, exhausted by the combination of Hannibal's revelations and his seizure. Hannibal softly closes and locks the door. His whole body is tingling as though he'd experienced orgasm.

Although he is still dressed in his nightclothes, he decides to forego his normal routine and skip showering and dressing. Humming, he dons a dressing gown and slippers before hurrying to his den. Hannibal gathers his drawing materials and settles comfortably at his large desk. He plans to sketch all morning long; one eye to the monitor with Will's image, dedicating himself to his sketchbook. He hopes by lunchtime it will be filled with page after page of Will in all his luminious beauty; feral, haggard, weeping, and broken. *'Only five days*,' Hannibal thinks smiling, *'And we have already come so far.'*

He looks tenderly at the image on the monitor;' *I must plan a special meal for Will when he is ready to join me at the table; it shouldn't be long now.'*

A little off the sides

Chapter Summary

William and Freddie bond over a haircut. Jack and William speak about chores. allowance, and their upcoming appointment with Dr. Chilton.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is dedicated to smileupward_fah, and llfrozensunll who leave me the best comments an author could wish for. Thanks!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Supercuts: Baltimore, Maryland

"Buzz it all off" says William to the hair stylist.

The young woman frowns, looking at the boy in the mirror.
"Are you sure?" she says doubtfully. "All your cute curls? Your mom says that this is OK?" she glances significantly at Freddie who is being forced to wait outside because of the dog. Freddie is attempting to speak on one phone, while texting on her tablet; as, all the while, the pug strains at its leash.

William smiles.

"She told me it was OK but you ask her if you want to," he says.

The woman walks to the door and capturesFreddie's attention, "Hello!? You're the mom of the boy getting his hair buzzed short?" she asks.

Freddie's blank look is quickly replaced by a disingenuous smile; she glances in at William who is smiling broadly.

"Yes," she coos sweetly, "I'm his mom, is there a problem?"

"No problem," the woman replies, "I just wanted to make sure you were alright with him getting a buzz cut. A lot of moms have a hard time letting go of the curls."

"Well," Freddie hesitates playing the role of sad, but supportive mom, "it'a what he wants, so I said it was OK. But, maybe... " Freddie hesitates and the stylist smiles encouragingly, " you

could keep a couple curls for me so I can put them into his baby book?" Freddie says shyly; an emotion she has rarely experienced.

The other woman smiles approvingly, "sure, I can do that for you," she says, "I scrapbook too..." she begins but stops short; Freddie has already returned to her electronic devices.

Quickly noticing the woman's crestfallen expression; Freddie grimaces, shrugging helplessly while mouthing,"Sorry...work" and points to her phone.

The friendly stylist smiles and nods understandingly. She returns to William who has been watching the entire performance from his chair.

"OK," the woman says to William as she gathers her spray bottle, and clipper attachments, "your mom said it was alright ...and I'm sure your dad doesn't mind, am I right?" she says, misting William's hair with cold water.

William's shivers as cold water finds its way around the plastic poncho and trickles down his neck; his mood instantly darkening at the mention of his father.

It was because of Will that William was cutting his hair; the idea suggested from Hannibal Lecter himself. In one of his letters written to William, Hannibal had explained how ancient Greeks had cut their hair as a physical manifestation of mourning. Though Hannibal had been referencing William's mother when he wrote about the practice, William now wonders if Hannibal hadn't been trying to tell him something else; a warning that one day his dad would be taken away.

William's stomach is experiencing the familiar queasiness it always does when he thinks about Hannibal and his father together; he pulls himself together when the woman seeks his eyes in the mirror.

"Yeah, he says," my dad is fine with it."

William runs his hand over the top of his head; it feels sharp and spiky. "*Perfect."* He thinks, "*it feels just like I do these days*."

"I'll pay you back as soon as I can," he tells Freddie as they leave Supercuts.

"That's OK," she replies, eyeing William's new look critically while dumping the envelope full of curls into a curbside garbage can."You look like you're getting shipped off to Kabul," she teases.

"Where?" asks William as he pulls on his knit hat; his ears are freezing.

"Never mind," says Freddie, "Do you want to go sit in my car so we can talk? Or is there a place around here that is dog friendly so we don't have to stand out in the wind?"

William consults his phone "I have to be back in half an hour, let's go to your car," he says, happily relieving Freddie of the dog.

"So," says Freddie as they settle themselves into the front seats, the dog already settled on William's lap, "why do you want me to be your legal guardian? I heard that Jack Crawford was taking that on?"
William, she notes, is avoiding eye contact, unusual for the kid who is usually bold as brass.

"I just think that it would be easier if I lived with you is all," he replies, scratching the now snoring dog.

"Easier for what?" asks Freddie, eyebrows rising," What do you have in mind?"

"I want to find my dad," William says turning his intense gaze on her as he speaks.

Freddie feels as though she is being tested by those serious, blue eyes.

"And you don't think living with Jack would allow you to do that?" she asks,thinking, "*That's probably true*."

"You know it wouldn't." scowls William. He feels as though Freddie is treating him like a little kid; he doesn't have time for that.

'I'm sorry for your loss,' Jack Crawford had said.

'Mr. Crawford has already given up on dad,' William thinks.

"Mr. Crawford thinks my dad went with Hannibal on purpose," he says.

"Huh," says Freddie mildly, but inside she is secretly electrified at this revelation. Though Freddie had written with this assumption in mind; this was the first time she had confirmation about her suspicions.

William isn't fooled by her seemingly disinterested demeanor;he already resents the fact that Freddie's articles don't refute Jack's opinion about Will.

"Tell me about Mason Verger," he says grimly;smirking when Freddie's eyebrows quirk at the name.

"What about him?" she says suddenly serious, "Why are you interested in him?"

"I found out about his reward for *'information leading to the capture of Hannibal Lecter'*" William quotes,"but when I called the number and they heard I was just a kid they hung up on me," he says.

Freddie, in spite of herself, is taken aback at the tack the boy is choosing.

"William," she warns, "Mason Verger is a very bad man, you don't want to mess around with him."

William rudely blows a raspberry, "Yeah, yeah," he says," compared to whom? Hannibal Lecter? "he adds resentfully. He has read about Mason in TattleCrime, the guy was an invalid, paralyzed from an accident involving his own pigs; William shudders at the image.

Freddie frowns. She has a pretty good idea of the sorts of things that go down at Muskrat Farm when kids are brought in; you don't need a body to be able to inflict pain on a child.

"Whoever finds Hannibal will find my dad," William argues stubbornly. "I just want to see if I can find out how he's looking for him; and the sooner, the better."

William has seen an electronic copy of the Verger's poster promising five million dollars for the capture of Hannibal Lecter; he wonders what kind of person hunts people for money.

He worries that his dad might get hurt or even killed in the process.

"Collateral damage," he says, quietly,looking out the window.

"Collateral damage?" Freddie asks but thinks, *'Damn right about that; collateral damage is the name of the game whenever Hannibal Lecter is involved*.'

"Can you *please* not do that?" William snaps.

Freddie realizes that her innocent act isn't going over well with William. She can't help but smile at the boy's irritation; his response is endearingly reminiscent of her little brother. "OK," she capitulates without further explanation. "Sorry."

"I just want to talk with him," William says, "Maybe he'll agree to meet with me if I say I have information about Hannibal." he adds hopefully.

"The problem isn't that he won't meet with you" Freddie says cynically, "He'd probably love to get his hooks into you. I'm sure Jack wouldn't allow you to go; that's the problem." She says.

"Then I just won't tell him" William replies breezily. "You can take me there and then bring me back." He can see that Freddie's intrigued by the plan; he knows that she would love an excuse to snoop around at Mason's guarded estate.

"The only thing is" William continues, his chin jutting, "For all this to work, you can't write about any of this until I get my dad back; safe and sound."

Freddie's mouth involuntary drops; this was a possibility she hadn't taken into consideration, "*Stupid of me not to have though*" she thinks tilting her head as she weighs her options.

"What if I say 'no'?" she asks.

William's expression hardens and suddenly Freddie sees Will Graham, *'Miss Lounds it isn't... very smart... to piss off a guy... who thinks about killing people for a living*.'

"What if I just tell Jack that you met with me behind his back?" she tests.

This threat results in unexpected cascade of giggles from William. Freddie purses her lips and waits until he becomes serious again; it doesn't take long.

"I don't think it's to either of our best interest to do that, Freddie" William says looking at her with a sad smile. "You think about it, and let me know. You have my number."

Before Freddie has time to react, William places the dog on her lap, opens, the door, and darts outside and down the street.

"*Hannibal The Cannibal Ate My Father: Tattlecrime Exclusive.*" muses Freddie. *'Humph, close but could be wordsmithed a little*.' she thinks as she starts her car and pulls out of the parking place. She not worried however; she has time to figure out a better one.

Winding her way through traffic, Freddie considers whether she should actually pursue guardianship of William.
'That kid's an odd one, 'she thinks, as she waits at a light. She decides to research the process before promising anything to William. Until that time, she plans to help him anyway she can and begins a mental 'To Do' list.'

Just then Freddie gets a text; it's from William

Hi Freddie,
Here is the link

for 'The People's Law Library of Maryland'.

It tells you the steps you need to take to become my guardian.

Just until I get my dad back. WW

Jack Crawford's Home, Baltimore Maryland

When William gets back to Jack Crawford's house, he is dismayed to see that Jack's car is parked in the driveway.

'Oh,no. He's home early.' he thinks, sprinting up the lawn and yanking open the front door.

He is in luck, Jack has just taken off his overcoat and is putting his keys onto the hallway table.

"Hi ,William" Jack smiles but his eyes remain sad, " Let's be a little more quiet, Mrs. Crawford is sleeping." He looks down at the boy, "Now where are you coming back from?" Jack doesn't appear suspicious, yet, as he puts his Homburg into the closet.

"Just out walking around the neighborhood." William answers, pulling off his own jacket and knit cap; his cheeks are rosy from the run.

Jack pauses in his routine and stares at William, "What have you done to your hair?" he asks.

William's hand strays upwards as Jack walks over in order to get a better look the boy's new buzz.

"Well," Jack chuckles, "It looks mighty fine; if you're going for is the jarhead look." He says, his eyes twinkling."Did you mean to get it cut like this, or was it a mistake?" Jack stops his teasing when he realizes something. "Where did you get the money for it?" he asks, a thread of concern woven into the levity.

"Kids cuts are ten bucks" William says, allowing Jack to run his large hand over the bristly top of his head. "I had a ten dollar bill in my luggage so I just used that." he lies.

Jack chuckles again as he grabs his briefcase and begins to walk down the hall and into his office, "Come with me William, " he says looking over his shoulder, " and I'll pay you back."

Jack glances down at William as he unlocks his office door and swings it open for him to enter. William is suddenly flooded by the memory of the first time Will opened the farmhouse door for him *'Welcome home'* he had said smilingly to William.

William is irritated to feel the hot sting of tears at this memory. Luckily, Jack hasn't noticed since he's currently busy unpacking his briefcase, turning on his computer, and plugging his phone into a charger. William leans against the door chewing his thumbnail; comforted by watching Jack's routine. Finally, Jack takes out his wallet and hands a bill out to William who walks over and takes it.

"This is a twenty," William frowns, holding it back to Jack," I don't have any change."

"Keep it William," Jack smiles. "I should probably be giving you an allowance anyway, right? How about ten dollars a week?"

William is torn. On the one hand he needs the money; on the other, he doesn't want to be beholden to Jack Crawford.

Jack, sensing his unease and guessing its cause, places the bill back into his wallet. "How about this then?" he asks hoping to assuage the boy's pride, "You can earn your allowance by doing chores around the house."

"What kind of chores?" asks William who had done a little bit of everything back home with Lottie; he pushes the thought of his mother away.

"Well, laundry, dishes " Jack says and laughs as William blanches at the mention of his least favorite chores. Jack leans against his desk considering, "How about this," he says, "Let's make up a list of chores, and you can pick from it. As long as you do your share, I don't see the problem with having you choose which ones you'd like to do. Sound fair?" he says.

"OK",says William.

"Good man," smiles Jack, " Let's shake on it, and then I've got to get some work done before dinner."

William hesitates then offers his small, cold hand; Jack's large warm hand envelops it and they shake.

"Oh, and William?" Jack says to the boy as he is heading out the door. " You and I are going to meet with your new school's director tomorrow morning." William nods. "Also," Jack hesitates, watching the boy for a reaction." In the afternoon we are going to go visit a doctor, a colleague of mine."

William frowns and stiffens. His empathy has already informed him that Jack doesn't mean a medical doctor and he resents the idea of being forced to talk about his 'feelings' like he did back in the group home.

"Who is it?" he asks, "Alana Bloom?"

"No, not Dr. Bloom" Jack says taken aback at William's guess. "She is still...recovering." he says.

William nods again; he has read about what happened to Alana Bloom.

"His name is Dr. Chilton" he says, "And he has very kindly made time for us in his busy schedule," eyeing William skeptically, " So I'm expecting you to be on your best behavior. Alright?" Jack asks, wondering what was going on behind those innocent looking blue eyes.

William stops himself just in time before a snide remark pops out.

"Sure Mr. Crawford" he says, " I understand that everyone is just trying to help me. And I'm grateful for the help." He lies.

Jack doesn't buy William's innocent act but decides to let it go.
"Well, it's like you say William," he says seriously, hoping the boy will take his message to heart, "we are all just trying to help. Now, why don't you ask Mrs. Lane what we're having for dinner. "He says settling into his desk chair; his eyes already glued to his monitor.
When he sees the message about the Canadian Mounties reports of Hannibal and Will sightings; Jack sighs and looks up to say goodbye.

William is already gone.

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1 New Message
OK got lawyer-will discuss guardianship.

Also, Ms. Verger will meet w/us.

Best I could do.

Meet me Th. @dg prk same time. FL

William reads the message and smiles. Then he goes up to his room and reads everything TattleCrime has ever published about Dr. Frederick Chilton; he's going to be prepared for their meeting.

Chapter End Notes

I just love the idea of William messing with Chilton, but I'm not certain how far I should push it. Poor Grumpy Cat Chilton.

*Jarhead is a slang term for a U.S. Marine.

Your kudos makes Freddie dig the envelope of curls out of the trash can; Will might want them some day.

Your comments allow William to bring all Will's pack to live with him at Jack's.

The Enemy of mine Enemy

Chapter Summary

William meets Chilton and discovers Jack has lied to him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Baltimore, Maryland

'That went well ' Jack thought, pleased at the outcome of their meeting with William's new school administrators. William had appeared impervious to nerves as he answered all the questions directed to him and even managed to stay politely present when the adults were speaking amongst themselves. The school's class size, eight to ten students, was a selling point as far as Jack was concerned. He was too distracted with Bella's care and his own responsibilities with work to have anything left to give William; small class size equaled plenty of adult supervision in Jack's eyes. Walking through the campus during the tour, it hadn't escaped William's notice that a large number of the student's behavior was due to what the director termed 'learning differences.' William assumed that this is was why this particular school was chosen; his own experiences creating an expectation of emotional and educational hurdles he would have to overcome. That was fine with William. The lower the expectations, the better; he wasn't really interested in school these days. The school's structure also allowed for the majority of its students to be pulled out of class for scheduled appointments. This little tidbit, mentioned by the director to Jack had William pricking up his ears like a little faun.

'Perfect,' he thinks, 'Bella will be happy I'm here, Jack likes it, and if I'm careful, I can forge his signature and arrange 'therapy sessions' when I need to get out of school. Freddie Lounds is **so** *going to come in handy.'* he thinks as he follows the adults back to the office.

On their way to their appointment with Chilton, Jack had treated William to huge, messy hamburgers. But as soon as his burger was placed in front of him, William's appetite flagged; he suddenly recalled that burgers were to have been the meal Will cooked the day he was taken. Jack eyed him curiously as William picked listlessly at the bun.

"Psst, William." Jack said conspiratorially and William looked up to see him smiling.

"'Don't tell Bella" Jack said, as he called their waitress over to order curly fries and chocolate malts; William had laughed at Jack's guilty expression, and found he was hungry again.

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BSHI

Jack parks in the guest lot for the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. The name alone caused a squirmy feeling in William's stomach; like the time Will had showed him how to gut a fish.
When Jack had requested this meeting, he had hoped to conduct it in his own office, but Chilton had balked at the idea; so Chilton's office it was.

The moment William steps into the hospital, he is assaulted by a noxious swirl of smells: bleach, sweat, plastic sheets, vomit, and stale cooking. He stops dead in his tracks, afraid to go on; afraid that Jack might trick him into entering a cell and lock him away forever. It takes a few minutes of negotiation, but Jack finally manages to slowly maneuver William along their route of corridors and stairs towards Chilton's office. Short of picking the boy up and carrying him, a time saving action Jack knew William would resent, it took them far longer to reach Chilton's office than Jack had planned on. Twenty minutes late, they stand before a door labeled with a brass plate reading "Dr. Frederick Chilton, PhD, Administrator. William frowns, the brass plate seems pretentious and boastful, yet he can't wait to get out of the corridor and into the safety of a smaller, enclosed space.

"Come in."says a voice in response to Jack's knock and he opens the door, William rudely pushes past Jack, eager to gain entry.

A man was standing with his back to them, looking out of the windows. William glances around the room; large, opulent, and clean in a way that the rest of the shabby institution isn't, 'I *think Chilton is stealing money that should be used for the patients here.' His* inner voice remarks.

William's look of disgust at his thought is unfortunately the first thing Chilton sees when he finally turns to greet his visitors; a reactionary scowl pulls down his large mouth.

"Sit down."he orders, rather than requests, and Jack's eyebrows rise at Chilton's snarky attitude; they were already off to a bad start and the meeting hadn't even begun.

"Dr. Chilton," Jack says respectively, hoping to stroke the man's ego, "This is William Wyse. William,'" Jack looks down at William and gestures towards Chilton, "this is Dr. Chilton; he runs this whole hospital."

Knowing what was expected of him; William walks to where Chilton is leaning on an ornate cane and offers him his hand. Chilton studies the boy for signs of mockery before finally taking it and shaking it lightly then dropping it like a hot rock.

"Hello, William" He says dismissively, "You may call me Dr. Chilton." Then he walks past William, unconsciously rubbing the hand which touched William's against his trousers, around his desk and carefully lowers himself onto his chair; he looks questioningly at William.

'Well...? "He says to the boy who is still standing by the window, "Come over here. Have a seat."

William obeys and sits next to Jack; he notices that the guest chairs are much smaller and less comfortable than Chilton's own.

"William." Chilton begins, sweeping his eyes over the papers on his desk and coming to rest on the boy in front of him; William waits, expectantly.

"Why do you think you are here?" Chilton sniffs as he asks the question."

'A habit,' thinks William, *'not due to a cold or allergies*.' He feels unease pouring off of Chilton and something else...fear. William's brows knot. *Is Chilton is afraid of him, or of the situation*? Confused, William remains silent; to the men in the room, it appears that he is struggling to answer the question. Chilton is impatiently waiting, his finger's of both hands steepled together and pressed against his lips; William knows it's to hide the scar on his face.

"Because...a lot of bad stuff has happened." William finally answers, "And..." he pauses, "Because Mr. Crawford thought it was a good idea." He finishes in a burst of honesty. He glances at Jack to see if he approves of his answer, but Jack is looking down, studying his own hands.

"You're right William,' Chilton agrees. " 'A lot of *bad stuff* has happened', and to a lot of good people." He sniffs and looks at Jack who meets his gaze and nods contemplatively, " And so..." he looks at William, "when bad things happen, it's important to talk about them."

William has heard this reasoning, many times before, and it's never sat well, "Why?" he challenges, prompting Chilton to look both annoyed and wary.

"Jack" Chilton says, "maybe I should speak with William alone? I'll call you back in..."he consults his computer" fifteen minutes or so."

Jack looks to William for permission and William nods.

"Very well Fredrick." Jack says. Then, remembering William's explosive meeting with Will, he adds, "William, I'll be just outside if..."

William nods reassuringly.

"We'll be fine." sniffs Chilton dismissing Jack and shuffling files around.

'Chilton is rude.' thinks William and wonders what Hannibal would do if he were here.

"*Be good*." Jack silently mouths to William before he closes the door.

William is still smiling at Jack's silent message when he turns back to Chilton who is eyeing him uncertainly; William's smile slides off like warm butter.

Chilton clicks a file on his Mac and states, the date, time, location and 'patient name'; he clicks the 'record' icon.

"So William," he says, tapping a pen against his teeth, an action which immediately puts William on edge, "I'd like to ask you some questions, and it's important that you answer them

as truthfully as you can, alright?" He looks for and receives William's nod of compliance. "It says here you attacked Will...your dad in the FBI headquarters?" Asks Chilton, "I'm curious about that. What were you so angry about William?"

William stares at him; the memory isn't a pleasant one.

Chilton sniffs and reads aloud from the file, "DNA paternity results administered to William Wyse, male minor..." Chilton looks up hopefully, "Was it because you were angry to discover Will was your father?"

"The DNA paternity results?" asks William; suddenly there isn't enough oxygen in the room. "The Q tip test," he adds and it's not a question. "Like the one they did at the...clinic."

Chilton looks embarrassed, "Well, I don't know about that," he says, "I guess I must have skipped over that part of you're..."

"It was part of a rape kit," William interrupts," The one Jack had me do was...different, just a check swab."

Chilton gives a sigh of relief, he is back on solid ground here, "Yes, well, both are made to gather DNA but the one... " He looks at William, " *'Jack had you do'* he quotes," was to collect your DNA so they could compare it to your dad's; Will Graham.

"Paternity." William repeats stupidly because it all makes sense now.

'One more thing before you go William?' Jack had said, 'This man is going to take a mouth swab from you. It doesn't hurt. It's just a Qtip he'll rub along the inside of your cheek. OK?'

'OK' he had said, 'but what's it for?'

'Oh, it's just something we do for our files.'

Jack had looked him straight in the eye and lied to him.

Worst of all, William thinks, is that he had believed him and had blamed Will for the whole stinking mess. William's face flames at the memory of kicking, hitting, and head butting Will; he can taste the hamburger he'd eaten for lunch.

And just like that, William's tenuous friendship with Jack evaporates like virga in the desert.

The fact that he, himself, was deceitful William did not consider.

'Can I trust anything anyone says to me?' William thinks. *'If Jack lies, what about Freddie Lounds?'*

'So what?' his mind sneers, 'Jack played your dad; now he's playing you. What did you expect? Don't act like such a baby.'

William's last day at Wolf Trap flashes into his mind.

"Dr. Chilton," William says " Hannibal said something to me back at my...at the house in Wolf Trap. "

"What did he say William? " asks Chilton, leaning forward, obviously intrigued; his curiosity seems obscene.

"I told him he was a liar, William says, and suddenly he is transported back to that moment.

He is standing, shaking, next to John's corpse; his mom's gun is heavy in his hands, his throat burns with bile.

"He told me I didn't know him very well but that he wasn't a liar," says William and Chilton snorts his disagreement.

"Then he said..." William closes his eyes to recall Hannibal's exact words, " *'I 'm sorry to inform you, I can't say the same thing about your mother*, ' and he threw an envelope onto the ground."

William stops.

Chilton is engrossed by William's recollection, "Well, what happened then? " he presses impatiently.

"Then, I shot him." says William as though this was the least important aspect of his story.

Chilton frowns.

"Dr. Chilton, "William asks, "what was in that envelope that Hannibal Lecter dropped on the ground at the house?"

"Humph" Chilton huffs as he flips through pages. "I have no idea," he says," it's not mentioned here, but it would have been catalogued as evidence by the police. Maybe Jack can tell you what it was."

'Jack's a liar', thinks William but says nothing.

"Ooookay," Chilton drawls and types something on his computer. He sighs as though he's exhausted and says, "Shall we move on?"

William remains silent and Chilton sighs again.

"You know William, I can't help you if you won't speak with me." he says, pretending disappointment.

William wrinkles his nose, *'How could my dad bear to be locked up with this guy?'* he thinks.

Chilton decides to give their conversation, 'the old college try' once more, and continues his line of questioning, all the while tapping his mouth with a fancy, gold pen.

" Are you sleeping well, William? *tap, tap*.

"Are you troubled by nightmares?" *tap, tap*.

"Do you have thoughts, " *tap, tap*, " of...hurting yourself, or others?"

Finally, William can't bare it any longer, "Dr. Chilton?" he asks and Chilton looks at him, expectantly."Why is it that everyone is always trying to kill you?"

Just as he'd hoped, Chilton questions stop; his mouth drawing down into an angry frown.

'He looks like a bullfrog!' thinks William and can't help himself, when he laughingly calls out, "Ribbit, ribbit."

Chilton pushes back from his chair and limps angrily to the door, calling Jack back in.

William could care less; Chilton is of no further use to him. William leans back, rests his head on his chair, and stares up at the ceiling.

"If I were you Jack," Chilton says, glaring at the slouching figure on the chair," I'd seek out a trustworthy child psychologist; Roberts at Georgetown has a good reputation. " He sniffs. "Its clear to me that I can't help you." he adds.

Jack nods, "Well, thank you for your time, Fredrick, and the recommendation." He glances over to where William is placidly waiting, 'G*one fishing.'* ,Jack thinks, *'If he's anything like his dad*.'

On the drive back to Jack's , William says, "We should stop and get Mrs. Crawford some pears, she told me she misses them."

Jack looks appreciatively at William, "That's a good idea William, thank you." he says.

William turns toward Jack, "What was in the envelope that Hannibal threw at me?" he asks. "Dr. Chilton said it was in police evidence." William sees Jack's grip on the wheel tighten. "It was for me," William presses," I should be able to see it."

"Alright," Jack says unexpectently, "I can make that happen. But only if," he looks at William" we find you a therapist, and you start participating in counseling. "And not," Jack jerks his head back towards where they had come from," like how you spoke with Dr. Chilton."

"How many sessions?" asks William, bargaining.

"Ten."Says Jack ,buying for time; William needs to be shielded from the letter's contents.

"Fine." William agrees, already puzzling a way to get to it earlier; Freddie probably has a good idea of how to go about it.

As the scenery whizzes past, William continues to stew over Jack's deception. The desire to strike back is strong, yet self preservation tells William to hold off; he still needs Jack to like

and trust him. But when the day comes, William fantasizes, when Jack is no longer necessary, he knows exactly how he'll hurt him; and the answer is 'Bella.'

He wonders if Hannibal would approve.

Chapter End Notes

If this story seems to be draaaaaging, you're right!!! My excuse is that I'm trying to make it fairly realistic. In real life, a ten year old couldn't run around meeting with strangers, so I feel obligated to explain William's situation a little.

Quick poll: Does anyone think William killing someone (not Bella) too distastful?

Begin the Beguine

Chapter Summary

Due to Will's rapid decline, Hannibal once again resorts to hypnosis with surprising results.

Chapter Notes

I'm just back from a small vacation and was jonesing to write a new chapter and here it is!!
Let me know what you think!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1. **Day Twenty: Hannibal's Home in Virginia**

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Will's week following his seizure was redolent with physical and emotional setbacks.

At times, watching his friend mourn his son's 'accidental death', or torture himself needlessly about his part in John Morrison's murder, Hannibal struggled with what most humans would term despair. Will, for some inexplicable reason, unfathomable to Hannibal, continued to fight against his new reality.

For three consecutive days, Will refused to speak or eat, and Hannibal resorted to sedating him for large segments of time. Will's eyes, already large with its rim of dark lashes, now shown huge in his haggard face; their blue-green beauty dulled from drugs and pain.

On the fourth day, Hannibal was forced to reinstate the feeding tube and install a mouthpiece; a precautionary action which Will fought with every ounce of his quickly diminishing pool of strength.

Hannibal was loathe to admit it, but his friend was dying before his very eyes.

Each night, at the end of those intermitable days, Hannibal paced the lakeshore whilst his friend slept fitfully, crying out periodically in his sleep. Hannibal would stand on the windy shore, watching the moon rise over the trees, and the lake surface slowly fill with mist; a fitting analogy Hannibal thought to Will's own brain clouding itself with poison.

According to Hannibal's original timetable, he and Will would be leaving for Europe in less than three months, yet this plan's cornerstone was Will's compliance and acceptance of his new life. Will's downward spiral seemed to be in freefall and Hannibal was beginning to fear the worst; life without Will Graham.

So Hannibal, standing under the night sky and listening to the owl's call and response, decided upon a drastic course of action; he would regress Will back to childhood and attempt to rebuild their relationship from there.

Hannibal's research of existing case studies for such a therapy proved fruitless; he could find no precedence for his plan of treatment, which was clearly outside the realm of ethical practices. Hannibal Lecter even admitted to himself that there was grave concern for the viabilty of it's outcome.

On the seventh day of creation, Hannibal's catechism teacher had taught his class, God rested; Hannibal was not God, but he was, in his own estimation, a supreme being. Therefore, on the evening of the seventh day of Will's akinetic mutism, Hannibal induced Will into a drug induced dream state and hoped for a successful outcome.

"Will...Will." A voice is calling him, pulling him towards consciousness. Will feels irritation at being woken up; his life has been reduced to this, sleep, rousing, sleep rousing.
"Will, if you can hear me, open your eyes." Will's eyes flutter open and he sees he is seated in a dimly lit room, one he thinks he can remember seeing before *'In a dream*? 'He wonders. Dreams, and realities have become blurred, in his mind, he is often unable to discern which is which.

Hannibal leads Will outside for the first time in nearly a month. They stand together, on the flagstone terrace while the sun dips behind the tree line.

"Will." Hannibal says monitoring his friend's condition, " You are eight years old and back at your father's home. It is summer and school is no longer in session. Tell me, where are you, and what do you see and smell?"

Will's fuzzy expression relaxes into a small, shy smile and his speech became softer with a Southern burr. "I'm in my yard with Hambone, near our metal chairs and I smell..." Will inhales deeply, "Clay, and wet grass and 'Off', and the neighbors steers pastured down a'ways; they always pasture them in the lot near the pond in summertime."

Hannibal's eyes glow in the gloaming; his whole body relaxes mirroring Will's own ease. He inhales deeply. Will's scent has changed; it smells sweeter, the acrid smell of fear barely noticeable, and the warmth of happiness spreads throughout Hannibal's entire body.

"Very good Will." he purrs, but Will wrinkles his nose.

"Nobody calls me 'Will.'" He says. " 'Round here they call me 'Bud.'"

Hannibal smiles, "Very well then, 'Bud', what do you see?"

Will looks around him, "I sees my daddy. He's over theres,by the car port tinkering with our truck." Will looks down, "Here's good 'ol Hambone, he likes a scratch iffn he's nearby me."

Hannibal walks to a swinging bench and pats the space next to him, "Come sit with me Bud," He says, "I'm a friend of your father's , and I've come for a visit. You may call me Dr. Lecter."

Weak from lack of exercise, Will slowly shuffles over until he is standing near the bench. Hannibal puts out his hand; shyly Will takes it.

"I like your dog Bud," Hannibal says, gently pulling Will towards him until Will's shins touch Hannibal's knees. "I also had a dog when I was your age." Hannibal says, tugging Will down flush against him. Will squirms a little, uneasy with the close proximity, but Hannibal's arm snakes around his back, holding him in place. After so many days of watching Will rail against his situation, this childlike state is intoxicating. Hannibal can't help touching Will; an action which Will would, in his normal state, resist.

"Would you like to see a picture of my dog?" he asks and Will's head bobs up and down. Hannibal hands him a blank 3x5 card trusting Will's temporal lobes would supply the rest.

" A Dalmatian!?" Will squeaks excitedly, " I like those kinda dawgs, they live with firemen and ride on the engines. "

As Will speaks, Hannibal has slowly moved his hand to behind Will's head, gently playing with his hair, the way a father would cuddle with a son at the end of a long day. Will tenses at the sensation, then suddenly relaxes, leaning sideways to rest his head onto Hannibal's shoulder.

"Are you staying for supper?" he asks Hannibal quietly, "Cuz its getting dark." Then, Will suddenly sits upright turning his head from left to right, the predator in Hannibal tenses. "We should hunt for fireflies!" Will says excitedly, "Let's get us a jar and go into the trees!" Will is ready to jump off the seat but Hannibal restrains him.

"Bud", he chuckles pulling Will back towards him; Will stiffens and sulks at being held back. "We don't have time to catch fireflies now, you're going to come on a trip with me to visit my home. Once we are there, you may catch as many fireflies as you choose; would you like that?" Will looks so uncertain that Hannibal quickly presses his case," Your father has arranged for you to stay with me, just until he can find a new job and a fine,new home for you."

Will sighs heavily and slumps back against Hannibal, "We're movin' again?" he asks sadly as Hannibal comfortingly rubs his neck.

"Yes, I am sorry to tell you this, but your father has lost his job."

Will looks over to where he imagines his father is working, then he lowers his gaze, visably upset; Hannibal has a sudden, overwhelming desire to kiss Will's lowered eyelids but sucessfully surpresses it.

"Now, why don't you go say 'goodbye' to your father. I have already packed all your things and loaded them in my car." Will's mouth drops open slightly at this rapid and unprecedented turn of events. He looks simultaneously timid and surprised, but not, Hannibal is pleased to note, fearful. "In addition," Hannibal says, standing, "Hambone is waiting for you at my home. " Puzzled, Will looks around his feet, and his expression at finding Hambone inexplicably missing is so comical, Hannibal's laugh bubbles up; it feels good to laugh again after the last few weeks.

"He gets to come with?" Will asks tentatively.

"Of course," Hannibal assures him," I would not wish to separate you from your friend." Will's face is so radiantly happy that Hannibal 's breath catches; he drinks in it's winsome innocence before getting the wind knocked out of him by Will's sudden bear hug. The embrace is over as swiftly as it was bestowed but not before Hannibal 's breath is expelled in a little grunt of surprise. *This young Will is enchanting.* He wishes he could keep Will in this altered state for much longer; but "The devil drives when needs must" as his old nurse would scold; Hannibal needs Will as an adult, not a small, back country child.

Hannibal watches as Will says his goodbyes to his 'father' and then climbs into Hannibal's car. They drive down the property's long avenue and loop back again, arriving at the end of the roundabout. Hannibal helps Will out, firmly clasping the man's hand as he leads him up the walk. In an attempt to distract 'Bud', Hannibal chats calming about the types of shrubs which line the walkway. In response, Will's head swivels from side to side and then looks up, Hannibal perceives, in awe, at the exterior of the massive home.

Entering the tiled foyer, Hannibal turns to Will and says, "Welcome to my home, which will be yours for as long as your father needs you to remain here."

Will smiles but gently pulls his hand away, trying to mask this movement by turning his body this way while ogling the room. Hannibal smiles indulgently, pretending not to notice; there will be plenty of time later for physical contact.

As the pair proceeds down the hallway, Hannibal shows Will each room, and explains what he may and may not touch; setting down the sorts of rules and restrictions, he imagines an eight year old boy would expect to encounter.

Finally, they ascend the stairs and Will is shown into his own room. Predictably, Will is immediately drawn towards the large hospital bed, badgering Hannibal with questions about its many features, until Hannibal good naturally allows him to push all the buttons and demonstrate how to raise and lower the bedrails.

"Now," Hannibal says after a few minutes, touching Will's arm to garner his attention, "I am going downstairs to prepare our evening meal. While I am busy in the kitchen, I expect you to bathe, put on your pajamas, and be ready for dinner in half an hour; you know how to tell time, yes?"

Will nods his head proudly "Yes, sir, " and Hannibal responds by smiling and patting his head.

"Good boy." he says, and Will glows from his praise.

Hannibal runs the bath and shows Will the dresser where his nightclothes are stored. Will holds up a pair of flannel bottoms looking confused, "I'm most certain, these gonna be too big," he protests. Hannibal smoothes a hand over Will's shoulder reassuringly, then pulls out the boxers and t-shirts the adult Will prefers; he is curious as to which attire Will, in this state, will choose.

"Don't worry Bud, " Hannibal says as he busies himself around the room noting how Will tracks his every movement. "I believe you have experienced a growth spurt; you just try them on after your bath and see if they won't suffice; yes? If you still believe them to be too large, then I will find you other things to change into. Is that agreeable?" Will's face breaks into another sweet smile, and Hannibal's heart tightens at the amount of trust the child Will has endowed him with.

"Yes, sir," Will says following Hannibal into the powder room when he stops suddenly; he has caught sight of his own reflection in the foggy mirror. Will stares intently at it for a moment while Hannibal watches, fascinated.

"What do you see Bud?" he asks, turning off the water.

"H'it looks like my daddy, " Will says, already turning away, interested now in examining the large bath; he sniffs appreciatively at the salts Hannibal is sprinkling into the steaming water. "What's that you're putting in there?" He asks, gazing down into the bath as Hannibal stirs the water to disperse the crystals.

"These are bath salts." Hannibal informs him, drying his hand and gathering the remaining toiletries to place them in easy reach of the bather.

"Boys don't takes baths in perfume. "Will says, voicing his disapproval, "I don't wanna smell like a girl, Dr. Lecter," says Will a whine creeping into his voice.

"No, no, Bud." Hannibal assures him, "These salts are infused with eucalyptus oil."

Hannibal collects a bath towel from a shelf as he instructs the other man. " It is extracted from the eucalyptus tree which grows in a far away country called Australia; a land all the way around the world." He places a bathmat onto the floor in front of the tub, "It is a scent which is appropriate for boys and men. I bathe in it myself; it is a very manly scent I assure you," he smiles.

Will looks hesitantly back at the bath and sniffs again, "Australia..." he says thoughtfully, "Where the koala bears come from?" Hannibal's resulting laugh triggers Will's own laugh before he answers. "Exactly young man! Koala bears are indigenous to Australia, "he pauses should Will need an explanation, " And they subsist soley upon a diet of eucalyptus. If it is good enough for marsupials," Will laughs at the strange word, "It is good enough for us." Hannbial says, with a flourish and a warm smile.

Hannibal shows Will where to place his folded clothes after he has undressed. "Now Bud," he says before leaving, " Be certain to wash yourself well, and shampoo your hair." He gazes

thoughtfully for a moment at Will's profile, " However, it is important that you don't attempt to run the bath yourself; you could burn yourself by accident. Shall you need my assistance with any of this?" He asks. Will blushes and ducks his head.

"No," Will says, then looks boldly into Hannibal's eyes before saying reproachfully, "I'm not a baby you know!" Hannibal's brows rise. " I'm eight and three quarters! I'm more nine than eight!" He concludes with a voice of authority.

"Very well, " Hannibal smiles. "Based upon that wise assessment, I am assuming you shall not need my ministrations."

Will smirks at Hannibal's high-faluting words but says nothing.

"However, please call down should you have a question, or concern." Hannibal moves toward the door and pauses, his hand on the knob, " Now I will leave in order that you may have your privacy. " Hannibal closes the door , leaving it open a crack, then fully opens it once more.

"Oh, and Bud," he says to the man who is intently watching the swirling patterns the bath salts have made on the water's surface, "Do not lock this door." Will glances up at him. "That way, if you encounter a problem, I will be able to assist you more easily."

"OK" says Will absentmindedly, and Hannibal regrets not purchasing a few toy boats for this large tub; it is a perfect receptacle upon which to float boats.

Hannibal smiles at the last image he sees before shutting the door half way; Will lost in contemplation of the bath's steaming surface.

As soon as Hannibal's footfall is heard on the stairs, Will pulls off his clothes and sinks into the warm bath. He immediately dunks his head under the water and when he surfaces, all vestiges of 'Bud' have been eradicated.

Jesus! Will rubs his dripping face with a shaking hand. *Is Hannibal actually buying this? He's got to be too smart for my shit.* Will begins to shake in spite of the steaming water. He squirms with disgust and humiliation, ruminating upon his own part in Hannibal's plan to control him through his regression to 'Bud'.

What the hell is he doing? Is this a trap? Will can feel he's right on the ledge of a looming panic attack; he knows that lucid moments such as these are precious and not to be wasted.

Will pours shampoo into his palm and lathers it into his hair. *Has my tolerance for the psychoactive drugs been built up? Or did Hannibal purposely administer an improper dose- maybe even a placebo to gauge my reaction?* Will's heart clinches with fear at this last possibility. *Don't get paranoid! He'll smell it on you!*

Will takes a moment to center himself, eyes closed, breath regulated.

OK, 'Bud', he orders his counterfeit persona, *Let's figure out a plan; we have half an hour to do this.*

Then Will soaps and rinses himself with the sudsy water. He wishes he could drain the tub and run fresh, but fears Hannibal would hear the pipes running and come up in response. *Soapy water it is.* He thinks grimly.

He wonders about William, and the other stories Hannibal has told him, and it takes a superhuman effort on his part push his these thoughts away. *Just get the hell outta here, Graham*, he orders himself as he rises dripping from the tub, and steps down onto the mat.

Just get the hell away.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Your kudos allows you to watch Will play in the bath with a fleet of toy boats; Hannibal had some after all-yay!.

Your comments allow Will to make a homemade bomb from bath salts a la Captain Kirk vs. the Gorn in that classic episode "The Arena"

In Dreams...

Chapter Summary

William's nightmare about Will makes him doubt his father's true nature.
Bella is a sweetheart
Freddie drives like a maniac.
Mason reveals a truth which only reinforces William's doubts about Will.
Margot proves to be a good friend.

*Tags added for a nightmare sequence which describes a sort of DarkWill's torture of animals-it's just a dream! Honeybunny Will would NEVER hurt an animal!!

Chapter Notes

Why do I like writing Mason so much? There must be something wrong with me.
The nightmare sequence is inspired by a scene in "Perelandra" the 2nd in the sci fi trilogy C.S.Lewis wrote.
I've also thrown in references to :101 Dalmations, Jungle Book, Make Way for Ducklings, and Forrest Gump cuz William seems like the kind of kid who would have watched that movie with his mom...in footie p.js.

Jack's house:Baltimore,Maryland

William is dreaming.

The small part of his brain which knows what's coming next is attempting to warn him.

'You'd better wake up,' It says, 'This is going to get scary.' William ignores the little voice, because, really, what is there to be scared of? He's at Wolf Trap in Will's front yard; it's a beautiful snowy day and he's happily building a snowman. Bundled up warmly in one of Will's jackets, it's the first snow William's been in since his move from Pennsylvania. Then, as dreams do; everything changes.

William is standing, shivering, in a stark, industrial kitchen; it's shiny surfaces recollecting the Virginia morgue. Two men stand, shoulder to shoulder at a metal table, backs turned,

absorbed in a shared task. William knows that they are his dad and Hannibal without having to see their faces.

"What is it that you want William?" Hannibal asks without turning around.

"Dad?" William's dream self calls in a wavering voice sounding both weak and young.

"Go away William! " Hannibal adjures, but William is frozen in place; he's hearing strange and indistinct noises coming from the table, and in a crack between the men's bodies he glimpses movement. "Daaaaad." William whispers, to Will's back, as if whispering could possibly gain his father's attention without attracting Hannibal's. Will's back stiffens and his upper body twists at the waist to look behind him. Something about the manner in which Will's upper body turns without the rest of him moving is grotesque, and William gasps and steps back.

'Wake up, wake up, wake up!' his mind screams. Foolishly, William forces himself to stay in his dream; he wants to see what happens next. Hannibal steps aside to allow William a clear view of the table. The entire surface is covered with maimed and dying animals. Rats, mice, guinea pigs, geckos, kittens, and puppies; every type of small creature typical of childish pets is represented. William screams as he watches his father grab a puppy by its tail and slam it with savage force onto the metal surface. Will releases the crumpled body, ignoring its pathetic whines as it attempts to drag itself away on broken limbs; he's already reaching for another animal to repeat the process. The whole time, Will's face is trained on William's; a sly, cruel smile plastered to his face.

"If you insist on staying with us William," Hannibal says, not bothering to look up as he methodically, and systematically breaks tiny backs and slices off paws and tails, "You must do what we do, and become what we've become."

William wakes up screaming. He glances around breathing heavily, then turns his face into his pillow to muffle his keening; he doesn't want to risk rousing the household. After a long while, he shakily wraps his quilt around his body and sits up. He clasps his arms around his knees, and, just as he did after Will was taken, rocks back and forth, eyes fixed, chanting a mantra of, "Dad, dad ,dad, dad." Wretchedly, he stares at the still dark window; waiting for the sun to rise, praying its light will help erase the abomination of his nightmare father. A seedling of doubt of as to his father's true nature has taken root in William; and that scares him even more than the dream did. He lifts his face to the window and grimly waits for dawn.

William spends that morning with Bella watching college football. Lottie and William had only watched soccer together, so he doesn't much enjoy or understand this game; but it's better than being alone. Bella, noticing his dark circles, and listless movements entertains him with reminisces of what it was like growing up with three older brothers; brothers who were constantly getting into trouble or 'scrapes' as she called them.

"Do you ever see them?" William asks during halftime. "Now I mean?"

"Not often," Bella admits turning her head to smile; William worships her smile like druids worshipped the sun." One is deceased, one lives in Austria, and Lionel, the youngest, lives in New York City."

"New York; that's not far!" William says, taking the cup of ice water the nurse hands him and adding a straw; he likes to serve Bella himself when they're together. "He should come more often." Bella takes a small sip and wearily rests her head back.

"You'll understand better when you're older." She smiles in response to William's recalcitrant expression. "Cancer scares people; it forces them to face their own mortality, and it makes them feel powerless."

"I miss my mom." William immediately regrets his slip.

"I know you do. And I know you miss your dad too."

William thinks of his dream and feels ill. "I have to go now." He pushes back his chair.

"Alright."

William feels a warm rush of love and gratitude for their friendship. Bella never judges, or presses, or analyzes, or tries to force confidences from him. Impulsively, he picks up her cold , fragile, hand and kisses it. The resulting look of astonishment on both her and the nurse's faces makes William blush furiously, propelling him from the room.

"Well... whadda ya know 'bout that?" Bella laughs happily to her nurse who replies in tones too low for William to hear; then both women laugh.

Pausing in the hallway, William listens to their mingled laughter and smiles; he knows they aren't laughing at him. He understands they're laughing because it's a relief to laugh after weeks of crushing pain;"Laughter through tears" his mom used to call it.

And he can live with that.

Dog Park, Jack's neighborhood

Freddie is waiting for him at their designated meeting place when William arrives. He climbs into her car with its unique blend of motor oil, coffee, wool, and musk; Freddie is an incense burner.

"Hey there kiddo, " she greets him nonchalantly then quickly becomes serious."Are you sure you want to do this? We don't have to go over there you know."

"No, I want to." Insists William. He hopes 'Freddie the Fearless' or 'FF' as he thinks of her, isn't getting cold feet.

"Alright, " she says simply and starts the engine. They pull away from the curb with a peel of tires prompting William to grab the door handle; Freddie is driving like Cruella de Vil

chasing down the Dalmation puppies.

"I met Dr. Chilton, " William begins conversationally as he mashes the buttons of Freddie's radio; she frowns and bats his hands away.

"Leave it! " She turns it off. "I listen to my police scanner while I'm in the car." she says, twisting the knob of the scanner until she finds a clear signal.

Of course you do! William gasps when they nearly hit a curb.

"So how'd that go?"

"Off the record? " William heard that lion a crime show.

Freddie smirks, "Off the record."

"He's a douche."

Freddie snorts.

"Yeah, well, he's been through a lot." She concedes, barreling onto the highway; William looks with alarm as the speedometer inches past 70mph.

"How can I look at something that's stored in police evidence?"He asks as they dart around cars to reach the fast lane. Freddie considers the question as she freshens her lip gloss.

"What's in evidence that you want to see?"

"A letter, I think, that Hannibal was giving me that day." William says, not bothering to elucidate.

"Huh."

An utterance William is becoming very familiar with.

"Depends on where it's being stored. If it's in a local police evidence room, no problem, their security is like Swiss cheese. But if it's with the FBI." She glances in her rearview mirror, checking for troopers. "Then you're out of luck kid. Why don't you just ask Jack?" William's scowl at the mention of his guardian surprises Freddie; she, like the rest of the world, have assumed William and Jack go together like peas and carrots. "Why can't you?" Seeing William refuse to answer himshe adds, " Hannibal didn't tell you what was in it?"

"No, but it has something to do with my mom." William's fingers dig into his palms. "Something that Hannibal thought proved she was a liar."

Whoa! Freddie has caught William's flinty expression. *That 'aint good!*

"Well, I wouldn't worry about it." She says off handedly, hoping to draw William back from the dark place he's in. "You think that you've got problems, " she says swerving around a slow moving taco truck, "At least you never ate Dr. Lecter's cooking!"

Her reference to recreational cannibalism has the desired effect of bringing William out of his funk, but only for a moment. "Ewww! "Did you?" His sassiness ends abruptly when he recalls how far his own father had chosen to go in order to trap Hannibal; Freddie's articles leave little to the imagination. His stomach clinches, *Dad...Why would you do that? How could you let him do that to you?!*

William and Freddie drive the rest of the hour long trip in silence; broken only by the staticky voices on the police scanner.

Muskrat Farm

'This place is huuuge, thinks William looking around Muskrat Farm's spacious grounds as they drive up its long, main road. Freddie's whole body radiates excitement; William knows she's planning on making the most out of this opportunity.

"You're welcome, " he says facetiously, as they pull into thei designated guest parking spot. Freddie grins in response, girlishly bouncing once on her seat before cutting the engine. William sighs in response but he can't help smiling at her enthusiasm.

They are greeted by a security guard who escorts them to the stables where Margot Verger is already waiting for them. Once she catches sight of their hostess, Freddie swarms Margot like the Marines swarmed the Normandy coastline.

"Ms. Verger, Freddie Lounds," She says, holding out a gloved hand to the woman. "Thank you so much for meeting with us."She gushes.

Margot forgoes taking Freddie's outstretched hand. "You're welcome Ms. Lounds, I've been a reader of your works for many years."

Freddie's smile becomes bigger and her blue eyes brighter; she turns to William, "William Wyse, this is Margot Verger."

"Hello William." Margot says, her voice low and reedy, as though she's out of breath, "It's good to meet you." Her glaze sweeps over to Freddie. "But it would be better for all of us. If we can make this quick. What would you like to know?"

"I want to know where my dad is." William says without preamble; a sheen of sweat is beginning to form on his forehead.

"And you want to know if my brother's found him?" Margot asks.

"Has he?" William asks hopefully.

"No." says Margot," Not that I'm aware of, and I'm certain, I would have heard about it if he had, even;" She adds, archly, at Freddie's fox-like expression, "If that knowledge is not intended for public consumption. But, William." Margot says, sincerely to the boy, "If I hear anything, I promise, I will personally let you know, alright?"

"OK." says William sounding a little breathless himself. In just the short time he's been near Margot, his empathy has turned on him like a screaming banshee. Margot, though, placid in appearance, oozes an intensity of pain and anger which cuts William to the quick.

'Too much, too much, too much! His mind chants as William attempts to protect himself by wrapping his arms across his belly.

Through the white noise buzzing in his ears, he is only dimly aware of Freddie saying, "William, are you alright?" William's pretty sure he's not, and swallows down a rising tide of bile. Images and sounds pound his brain like a sledge hammer: Margot's arm snapping as it's yanked behind her back, a childish voice begging someone to *Stop!*, Margot's head being wrenched backwards; this final image so similar to his own mother's final moments that it forces a release of the molten core of William's stomach. He throws up, barely missing Margot's expensive riding boots. Bleary-eyed and sapped of energy, he crumples to his knees before finally, and mercifully blacking out.

Mason's room, Muskrat Farm

"How is he Cordell?" Asks Mason as his doctor wipes William's face with a wet cloth."I do hope it's nothing catching." He adds, "Children are so...germy."

"He's fine Mr. Verger" says Freddie attempting to simultaneously record the room's every detail whilst still assuming the role of William's chaperone."He just got a little carsick from the long drive over." Her eyes, though large, take on a beady intensity as she gazes at the mask which blocks Mason's eviscerated face.

"They need to be going now."Margot says abruptly,snatching the cloth from Cordell and helping a woozy William up to his feet.

"What's the hurry, baby sis?" Mason snarls and William feels a tigress in Margot emerge as she glares at the men in the room. William is grateful for her protection. He's still feeling weak and quaky even after the ginger ale Cordell insisted he sip. Ever since waking up, and having to endure Cordell's creepy gaze he's worried about being forced to play 'patient' to his 'doctor. Even now, William is plotting where to land a well-aimed kick if it comes to that.

"At least let us feed the boy," Mason protests, "He needs to build up his strength."

"Thank you," Freddie hurriedly accepts. "That would be lovely. And it would be better for William also," she says turning to smile sweetly at his scowling face," If he could eat something before going on another long car ride." She looks to Margot who grudgingly concedes allowing William to be reseated; he's grateful however when he sees she's staying close by his side.

" What did you do to him down at the barn, Margot?" Mason mocks, "Force him to listen to passages from The Feminist Manifesto ?" He sees Cordell edging closer to William and smirks inwardly. "Hell, that's enough to shrivel the sac on any man; never mind a kid like him." It's OK, William." He says to the uncomfortable boy."My sister Margot scares me too;

I'm just glad." he says, voice turning icy, "That I discovered she had guests before you slipped away without experiencing the Verger hospitality...Cordell!" Mason barks and his doctor reluctantly curtails his perusal of William to direct his attention to Mason. "Have the cook prepare lunch for four." He says. Then, noting Cordell's confusion he adds, "You'll be sitting this one out Cordell." And William immediately breathes a sigh of relief. Next to him Margot is exuding quiet fury. In contrast, Freddie appears completely at ease in these shark infested waters; her smile never once dimming or wavering.

"I'm a vegetarian." she says to Cordell as he passes by, and he grimaces at being addressed. "A small, green salad is fine for me." She says with her barracuda smile," If it's not too much trouble." She calls to his retreating back.

Lunch ordered, Mason is now attending to his youngest visitor. "Will... Graham's...son." He says in a sleepy voice which is anything but sleepy. "What brings you here, to my humble estate? Did Margot ask you over for a play date so you could swap stories about your daddy?"

Margot shifts uncomfortably and William gets a quick impression of her and his dad kissing; *'What?* He thinks*, 'Yuck!'*

"Are the rumors true?" Mason asks, and William looks at him in confusion.

"I don't know." says William cautiously, "What rumors?"

"The one that says you shot Hannibal Lecter." Mason snaps.

"Yes." William says looking at Freddie who nods encouragingly.

"Come closer." Mason orders "Come over here where I can see you."

William feels like Mowgli approaching Ka as he walks across the large room. The smell of antiseptic and broken flesh becoming stronger the closer he gets to Mason and his strange collection of beeping medical equipment. When William reaches the middle of the room, he encounters a circular aquarium built into the floor. He stops to peer down into it. "Ahhh..."says Mason. "You've found my Moray eel." William hears a rustle of bed clothes as Mason shifts position. Freddie sees an opportunity and begins to follow William.

"Just William." says Mason and Freddie grudgingly acquiesces and returns to her seat.

"Muraena Helena." Mason continues as William stares down, fascinated by the large, muscular fish twisting and turning just under the surface of the glass. He feels a wave of pity for the animal; stolen from its cool, dark, ocean, only to be brought here and displayed in a small, bright tank. "They are actually one of only two species of fish which engage in cooperative hunting. Did you know that William?" Mason asks and William shakes his head. "Well...it's true." Mason says "Moray eels hunt with another species of fish called the Roving coralgrouper. Isn't that interesting ?" William looks up at the mask which conceals Mason and then back down at the tank; Mason is angry, but not because of the hunting habits of fish.

"Let me tell you how they do it." Mason says in a tone both salacious and bitter, "Listen up Margot" he orders, "You might just learn something about yourself." William winces. "A Coralgrouper will swim up to an eel it wants to hunt with and shake its head." Mason pauses, " Sorry, but I'm no longer able to demonstrate that part, but you get the idea." William purposely keeps his eyes trained on the tank. "If the moray is interested, it will swim over to a formation of rocks and into the narrow crevices that coralgroupers can't reach. The eels flush out the fish hiding there and *chomp, chomp, chomp*, everybody eats!" Mason cackles at his own story telling. "The only known case of interspecies fish hunting." Mason says musingly.

"Come all the way over here William. I want to tell you a secret. All boys like secrets." William is almost certain that isn't true, but he walks the rest of the way over until he is standing directly against the side of Mason's bedrail; the pungent smell of chemicals is strong. William stares at the painted mask; the eyeholes through which, he can see Mason's own glimmering eyes.

"Good boy." Mason praises. "I understand your father was taken by Hannibal Lecter." William nods. Like Ka, Mason's eyes hold the power to mesmerize; William can't seem to look away. "You know that I am searching for Dr. Lecter; don't you William?" William nods again. "Well...before I tell you, "Mason's voice drops to a whisper, " *my secret*...I'd like you to see my face; my real face, the one behind the mask."

Margot is stung into protest."Mason," she says, but, just as in his dream, William's compunction to see what comes next is overpowering.

"It's OK." He says. "I want to see it."

Margot's protests shrivel on her lips and, Mason snorts with laughter.

"Of course you do!" He approves.

Without waiting for permission, William pushes the mask to one side. The mechanism swivels to reveal: blobs of rubbery flesh cordoned by angry red scars, a nasal bone partially exposed, a mouth without lips, and two startlingly blue eyes gleaming with malice and mischief. William and Mason stare at one another; then William nods because he understands. Pigs didn't do this to Mason; Hannibal Lecter did.

"You understand what my secret is, don't you William?" Mason murmurs. " A smart boy like you? So tell me," Mason's voice is sibilant like a snake and William's knees inexplicably turn rubbery. "Which one do you think your dad was? He hisses. " The Moray, or the Coralgrouper ?"

William's jaw drops open.

" You want to find your father?" Mason 's chocking laugher causes his damaged body to rock. "Well I'm sorry William," his voice a mere breath,"but after I find my two little fishies. I doubt there will be much left over for you to play catch with... Ahh..." Mason addresses someone over the head of the trembling boy,"Cordell is back...goody, goody, I'm starving!"

William looks over his shoulder to see Cordell pushing a trolley laden with covered dishes. Freddie smiles in acknowledgement of his arrival, but Margot surprises everyone by striding over to where William is, grabbing his hand, and half pushing, half pulling, dragging him from the room.

William's head is spinning from the sudden activity; he hears Mason angrily calling after them as they hurry down the hallway. William sneaks a peek up at Margot's stony face as they rush down long, carpeted corridors. Only after they've reached a small sitting room near the home's formal entryway does she release her grip on him. They stare at each other for a long moment, still breathless from their flight.

Margot breaks the silence with a weak smile. "How about we go feed my horses some peppermints?"

William's feels a wetness on his face he hadn't noticed before and realizes he's been crying;*again.* Ashamed, he turns his head away from Margot and angrily scrubs his cheeks with his sleeve.

"You can do that?" He asks sniffing a little,"It's not bad for them?" When he looks back again, Margot's smile is warmer than William has ever seen it.

" It's fine every once in a while...And William?" William looks up at her, " Don't let Mason upset you, Okay?"

Kinda too late for that now. William's lower lip trembles.

"Mason's a liar and a bully." Margot needs William to understand. " Don't believe a word that comes out of his mouth, alright?"

"Alright" agrees William, more for politeness sake than because he believes her.

"Good." She smiles again. " Come on, let's go."

The Changeling

Chapter Summary

Hannibal continues his therapy on Will. Domestic happiness with a twist.

Chapter Notes

Maybe sneaky Hanni has found a new avenue to Will's heart, you never can tell.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day 20: Nightime, Hannibal's Home in Virginia

Still damp from his bath, Will pulls boxers, t-shirt, and flannel bottoms on. He wipes the steam from the bathroom mirror and stands for a long while staring at his reflection. Then, he walks into his bedroom and over to the windows. Mindful of the tv monitor, he carefully examines the window's construction and locking devices under the guise of partaking of the view.

"Bud?" Hannibal is calling up the stairwell and Will cringes. He runs his fingers through his short, newly sprung curls and grimaces at his reflection in the tinted windows; Hannibal has replaced regular glass with ones made from an unbreakable polycarbonate material and the locks required a code.

"Coming!" he calls, leaving his room. He walks down the hallway attempting, during this brief moment of freedom, to get the lay of the land. All too soon, he reaches the top of the stairwell and looks down to see Hannibal leaning against the balustrade and looking up; waiting for his appearance. Though Hannibal noticeably relaxes when he sees Will, an expression, unreadable from this distance rolls down from his eyes to his mouth before disappearing completely. Will's armpits begin to sting with pin pricks of nervous sweat.

" I think you should go back and put your robe and slippers on, young man, Hannibal says, "you'll find them in the closet." Will lets out a sigh of relief, *Thank God*, its *just a sartorial issue, easily fixed,* and hurries back to don the missing articles of clothing.

The next time he descends the stairs, Hannibal is no longer waiting at the railing and Will's nerves sing with relief. He follows the sounds and smells of cooking to the large, gourmet kitchen and stops. His view of Hannibal's broad back and shoulders, waving the steam from a

pot to scent it's aroma brings him back sharply in time. A time long before his own betrayal of Hannibal, before William, before his own kidnapping. A time, Will thinks with a sharp pang when Hannibal was the best friend he had ever known; a man he had entrusted with his life.

Guess I still am trusting him with my life, Will approaches the archway leading into the kitchen. *How's that working out for you Graham?* He barely manages to keep a scowl off his face.

"Here you are, " Hannibal scoops what looks like greens onto a platter. On slippered feet, Will pads to the island which separates him from Hannibal and the cook stove and stops; he is suddenly hyper aware of all the sharp objects in this space.

Hannibal glances up, looking so much like he did back in Baltimore that Will feels a tightness in his throat.

"Do you know the proper manner in which to set a table?"

"No, sir, " Will admits, casting back his mind to when he was eight and living with his dad; *What would I have known*? It's so long ago, he's drawing a blank.

"Let me finish what I am doing here and then I will instruct and assist you."

Will walks over to where Hannibal is and looks at the plates, "H'it smells good," he says sniffing appreciatively and his approval isn't an act; he's queasily relieved to see the meat dish still sports a tail. *Thank goodness, Long Pork's not on the menu tonight.*

"Black eyed peas salad, wilted greens, pan fried croaker, cornbread, and brown sugar buttermilk ice cream for dessert, " Hannibal, recites, just he would, back when Will was a guest in his cobalt blue dining room with its en suite herb garden. "Only if," Hannibal adds, wiping his hands on the tea cloth wrapped round his waist," you finish your dinner first."

Will rolls his eyes at this admonishment, though he finds Hannibal's choice of dishes touching; Hannibal is clearly catering to what he perceives 'Bud's' comfort foods to be. While Hannibal busies himself plating and garnishing the food, Will rejects the notion of 'Bud' telling Hannibal that his dad's 'low country cooking' consisted of Kraft Mac'n Cheese with hot dogs cut into it.

Hannibal walks past him and over to the hutch were the stemware is stored then stands, back turned, contemplatively before it. Will stares at that strong back and thinks of knives, and pain, and Abigail; awash in her own blood, lying on a cold, unforgiving floor. He swallows, and in an effort to cover his nerves, asks where the rest of the dishes are kept.

"Here," Hannibal replies pointing to a cabinet, "we shall need dinner plates as well as plates for bread and salad."

Over the next few minutes, Hannibal patiently instructs Will which plates, glassware, and utensils are necessary for a simple, family meal.

"Of course," Hannibal says, filling a carafe with water, but no ice, (water is meant to be drunk at room temperature he informs Will) should we be entertaining guests, the settings would be more complex. This," he indicates the set table, "is sufficient, as it is just the two of us. Would you like milk or water?" Hannibal asks while Will is placing the silver at each setting; suddenly, his peripheral vision catches a movement and when he glances to his right, Hannibal is mere inches away; Will never even saw him coming. He stiffens as Hannibal's gently rests his hand on his shoulder, ostensibly to steady himself while he leans over a chair to place the water carafe on the table. As he straightens, Hannibal pauses close to Will's ear, and inhales deeply; Will can feel the heat of Hannibal's whisper soft breath against his neck.

"Are you sniffing me?" He asks giggling and rubbing his neck against his shoulder as though he'd been tickled; internally, however he is panicking. *Breath, shit, relax, shit.*

"Yes." Hannibal confirms, walking back to the island and returning juggling multilple plates like a waiter. "I was checking to see whether you had followed my instructions and used shampoo; which, you clearly did." Hannibal smiles reassuringly and Will answers with his own shy grin. Relieved, somewhat, he finishes his task reflecting that he had performed the same exact 'sniff test' to William several times during their time together.

Our time together. Will can't stop himself from thinking. *Oh, God, William, Lottie, I am so sorry*. It takes considerable effort on his part to refocus himself to the here and now; he can dwell on the fate of William and his mother another time.

By the time they sit down to eat, Will is feeling relaxed and confident enough to continue with this charade. Hannibal, in turn, is amused to note that his dinner companion apes his every move; draping his napkin in the same manner of Hannibal, resting his knife along the side of his plate between bites, and carefully wiping his mouth whenever Hannibal did.

"Where's Hambone?" Will asks innocently, curious to see how Hannibal would explain the dog's absence. Unsurprisingly, Hannibal has a story prepared, explaining that Hambone was residing comfortably at a nearby kennel and being treated for worms; a procedure which would take a minimum of two weeks.

"Gross!" *Those must be some recalcitrant worms to need such an aggressive treatment*. When he looks up again, he sees Hannibal studying him intently; Will drops his gaze immediately hoping his host hasn't picked up on something he's let slip.

"Will." Hannibal says unexpectantly.

Will's gaze shoots upwards even as his mouth drops open.

"Why'd you call me that?" The corners of Hannibal's mouth quirk upwards, "And why're you starin' like that ?" He whispers, suddenly fearful. Will feels his eyes growing round and wet with surprise and apprehension. Moments bleed into one another as Will's gaze dances around Hannibal's face in confusion. In contrast, Hannibal appears preternaturally calm, face relaxed, palms resting on the surface of the table. Then something animalistic flickers out in Hannibal's gaze and his face softens into a nostalgic smile.

"I was just thinking about a story my old nurse would tell me when she became frustrated with my behavior, " he says, loading a perfect bite of greens and fish onto his fork.

"Was you bad when you was little?" Will asks,unconsciously, fiddling with the handle of his knife where it's resting upon his plate; Hannibal had not allowed him the use of the sharper variety; the sort, he, himself is currently employing.

"No...I rarely misbehaved. But I had opinions which varied from hers from time to time and inevitably it would lead to a clash of wills." He smiles at the man sitting across from him. " Would you like to hear one of the stories she would tell me?"

"Yes, please," Will says, jangled nerves relaxing once more. He takes a piece of cornbread and carefully butters it.

"Very well. It is called 'The Changeling.'"

Chapter End Notes

Quick poll.
Does Hannibal know?

Your kudos produces a Hambone look alike.
Your comments allow a tickle fight to break out at bedtime....hmm, note to self, write sexy tickle fight.

Rewrite- Storytime

Chapter Summary

Rewrite...Hannibal tells Will as story, more Will POV added. Will's mind palace is introduced.
Will's memories taken from the show and from previous chapters of this story.

Chapter Notes

Italics-thoughts, memories.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day 20, Hannibal's house in Virginia

Be thine own palace, or the world's thy jail.

-John Donne

"Once upon a time," Hannibal recounts, smiling at Will's rapt expression, "many years ago, there lived a boy whose parents believed him to be a changeling; a fairy child whom the trolls had replaced their own, human son with."

"Why'd they think dat? Did he have pointy ears or something?" *William has my dad's ears...and my eyes.*

"No", Hannibal says solemnly, "he looked exactly has he should have looked. The parents suspected him because of his unnatural and uncouth behavior."

Will sees himself wrapped around William as the boy hits and kick*s.*

"It ate the family out of house and home, and when it believed no one was present, it would run up and down the walls of the cottage, screaming and wailing."

"Oooooo, dat's creepy," Will remarks repelled by the imagery.

The Wendigo is crouching over William's prone body.

"The family despaired to be rid of it," Hannibal continues, " so, a wise woman from the village directed the mother to build a fire in the bake oven, lay the child upon the bake shovel, then act as though she was about to throw it into the fire, " Hannibal pauses for effect and takes a swallow of wine.

I didn't know what to else to do, Abigail beseeches, pleading for forgiveness from beyond the grave, *so I just did what he told me to do.* Will aches to comfort the shade-girl who has taken up residence in his head. *It's ok sweetheart... I forgive you. Alana forgives you.*

"Bud, are you paying attention?" Hannibal's tone is disapproving.

"Yes sir," he replies chastened.

Abigail's wraith twists and evaporates.

"Are you already tired of the story?" Hannibal asks, searching Will's face, "or perhaps," he suggests, "this is too frightening for you?" His expression is one of quiet concern.

"It's awright," Will says meekly, "I'm not ascared."

I'm scared, but not of the story. He is next to the dying Wendigo, pants soaked through at the knees from melting snow, cradling his son's cooling body.

"Alright then, I shall continue. Just at that moment, a little deformed, evil-eyed woman rushed up with the natural child, threw it on the floor and requested the return of her own child. 'For, she said,' Hannibal's voice is now one of a querulous hag and Will can't help smiling with surprise at his acting. 'I have never treated your child so badly,' Hannibal acknowledes Will's smile with one of his own, 'and I have never thought to do it such harm as you now propose doing mine!'

"*Regrettably Will, William is dead, but please, rest assured that I had no part in his death."*

And I had believed him; The Chesapeake Ripper, the Copy Cat, Dr. Hannibal Lecter. None of Hannibal's incarnations killed children.

Hannibal's face has taken on a shrewish look to accompany the voice, "Whereupon she took the unnatural child, and vanished through the door. The End."

Hannibal smiles. "Did you enjoy the story?"

"Yes," Will nods , and eats a bite of greens.

Hannibal does not kill children...But is it possible? Could William have actually shot himself by accident?

"Good, I'm glad," Hannibal is approving. "Now," he says," watch what I do." Hannibal grasps his knife and fork and proceeds to demonstrate how to create a perfect bite.

"You see, Bud?" Hannibal takes a sliver of fish, and adds a complementary amount of greens," eating these dishes together allows their flavors to blend, just as the cook intended."

Hannibal runs his loaded fork through a drizzle of sauce. Before he eats his bite, Hannibal, considers the symmetry of its contents before placing it in his mouth and chewing it thoughtfully.

"Mmmm," he says and Will smiles at his silliness. Then Will watches as Hannibal runs the sharp edge of his knife along the side of his plate, ostensibly to scrape off lingering sauce; the knife's shiny surface winks in the light. The sound of the metal grinding against the china sends a shiver down Will's back

"My nurse," Hannibal continues ," beginning the process of loading his fork once again," coming from Scandinavian stock, believed fairy folk to be afraid of iron." He smiles and lowers his head, conspiratorially. "Sometimes, I would notice her eyeing me as I stood near our iron cook stove; perhaps she thought I would prove myself a changeling by demonstrating fear."

"And was you afraid? Of the stove I means?" Will is uncertain of where all this is leading.

I still 'feel' William...but then again, I'm Hannibal's captive, pretending to be my eight year old self. My mental health's seen better days.

Hannibal doesn't answer right away, instead choosing to relish his bite and contemplatively swirling his wine.

Will stares, mesmerized, at the twirling yellow liquid.

"Never," he finally admits, "though, even as young a child, younger than you are now," Will fights an urge to squirm at his words," I thought hers an illogical supposition."

Will cocks his head, at a loss due to the big words, and Hannibal smiles admiringly. He enjoys Will's sweetly puzzled countenance as he sits obediently, listening to Hannibal's story, digesting Hannibal's delicious food. A feeling of warmth, born from being in his friend's company, even in these less than auspicious circumstances, blooms and blossoms, and he sighs contentedly.

"I remember arguing with her," he admits, shaking his head ruefully as he recalls his childish behavior, "that a hot oven, iron or otherwise, would naturally have the power to frighten any child, not just one with fairy parentage."

He winks at Will over his wineglass.

"Like Hansel and Gretel," agrees Will, nodding and wondering for the first time whether Hannibal had ever wanted to become a parent. In all their time together, he had never thought to ask, and he feels shame at this dereliction of his duties to their friendship.

Will is standing in a room of his mind palace. William is here, sitting in a dirty and sprung plastic couch. Even when Will is standing right in front of him, William

remains unaware of his presence.

"*What kind of father do you think you would make?"* Hannibal had asked during one of their sessions.

"*I'd be a good father"* He'd been blithely assured.

" Would you care for some berries on your ice cream?" Hannibal is wiping his mouth before folding and placing his napkin beside his plate.

Will mimics him.

"No thanks," Will says, remembering how, as a child he never liked mixing berries with ice cream, "Just plain please." *Shit, he immediately admonishes himself, don't get lost in 'Bud', don't forget, this is just an act.*

Hannibal killed John. But Hannibal does not kill children.

What happened to William!? Will's brain screams even as he begins to push back his chair in preparation to follow Hannibal.

Hannibal stops him. "Just remain here, I will be back shortly."

Chapter End Notes

Up next...Will's walls come a crumbling down...just like in that Pompeii song...

Scandinavian Changeling Legendshttp://www.pitt.edu/~dash/ashliman.html

The truth? You can't handle the truth!

Chapter Summary

Will enters his mind palace to retrieve important memories. Hannibal is going to be one very happy cannibal.

Chapter Notes

Chap 16 had some Will POV additions and intro'd his mind palace

Un-beta'd...point out grammer/puncuation errors if they bug you.
Italics-memories/thoughts.
dialogue from the t.v. show and "The Silence of the Lambs" book borrowed.
I love pop up books.
Happy Thanksgiving to U.S. readers

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day 20: Hannibal's home, Virgina

Hannibal rises and clears their dinner plates to make room for dessert. He walks through the archway that joins the two rooms and places the plates in the sink. Will watches him pull out bowls, spoons, plates and an ice cream scoop. Resting his head against the chair's high back, Will idly thinks that there have been too many times these past days (?) weeks (?) during which he'd lost track of who, and where he was. Just as he'd felt after killing Hobbs, he now senses another person inhabiting his head space; but this time it's William.

The drugs Hannibal's given me. What are they? Amobarbital, Amytal ,Flurazepam?

Hannibal retrieves the cylinder of home made ice cream from the freezer and dips the scoop in hot water. In quick succession he molds identically sized spheres of ice cream and deposits them into the bowls. He senses Will observing him and looks over, smiling. Will nods back absent mindedly.

Hannibal can't tell, but Will is currently pacing the halls of his own memory palace. *Where is it? Where is it?'*

He finally comes across what he's been searching for. It is a door, painted battleship-gray with "Psych Ward" stenciled on it's frosted window. He opens it and steps inside.

Hannibal's dining room's walls are folding down while at the same time the interior of a hospital room is expanding upwards; like a page in a pop-up book. Will is standing in his private room of the psychiatric ward. It is small, austere, cell-like.

What was that one doctor's name? He strains to recall, *the old one, who'd come around when my own doctor wasn't on call?*

For some reason, not yet clear, Will is feeling compelled to remember this man; something about him is vitally important.
Hubbard! he remembers, crowing triumphantly to himself.

Retrieving memories since he's been ensconced with Hannibal has become hard work, like attempting to speak a language he no longer recognizes.

"*Dr. Hubbard," the doctor had introduced himself, "like old Mother Hubbard."*

Dr. Jack Hubbard, mid sixties, ex-military, still sporting a white buzz cut which makes him look like an older, grizzled version of a G.I. Joe doll; he's in the room with him now. "

"Yes," the doctor had said ruefully, but with a twinkle in his eyes, " I keep dogs, just like Old Mother Hubbard in the nursery rhyme, but unlike her, I keep mine stocked with 50 pound bags of kibble!"

Will had liked him. Liked the way he would take time to just sit and talk. The two men acted as though they were sitting around a camp fire. Their conversations centering around fishing, and nature's wonders, and dogs. Any topic other than ones which leant themselves to their actual realities; an inmate and a doctor, both essentially locked inside a mental institution.

When Will asked his own psychiatrist, a tat'd-up kid, who in Will's estimatation appeared to be barely out of medical school, if he could switch doctors, he was informed Dr. Hubbard was a 'floater'; available for periodic conversations, but not assigned an actual patient workload.

In the kitchen, Hannibal is retrieving two ramekins from the refrigerator. One container is filled with homemade pralines broken into small fragments, the other holds chocolate shavings.

Will remembers days spent in his narrow hospital bed, shaking uncontrollably, uncertain of what was 'real' and what wasn't. Several times, after he had awakened from a nightmare, he would find Dr. Hubbard in the room, just sitting, lending him his calming presence. Will had rudely tested him once.

"Sitting Shiva doc?" He'd sneered.

In the real world, Hannibal collects heavy whipping cream, a whisk and a bowl.

One day, near the end of Will's committal, a representative from the FBI had met with Will and his lawyer. In a conference room, Will had been served papers outlining thirty federal indictments against him. Will had nearly laughed at the sheer number of counts, but his attorney had blanched and blustered his way through the meeting. It was immediately clear to everyone in the room, that this case was way beyond his pay grade, and the FBI lawyer had rushed through his task and left, avoiding eye contact. After mumbling a few platitudes to his, *client,* Will's attorney had stuffed the documents into his briefcase and beaten his own hasty retrea*t.*

Compared to this, Will had thought, watching the man's disappearing back*, Napoleon's retreat from Moscow was a raging success.*

It was after the orderlies had unlocked the 'cuffs which bound him to his seat, that he'd happened to notice who was now standing in the doorway.

Hannibal was there, leaning against the door jam, watching him.

Regrettably, Will had flipped out.

He had grabbed the closest chair and charged, scattering orderlies in his wake. Even after he was tackled and his face slammed roughly onto the floor, he still managed to turn it upwards, to catch the slow, delighted smile which spread across Hannibal*'s features.*

"*He's right there, you idiots!"* Will had shouted as he was hauled roughly to his feet, *"He's standing right there! Don't you know who that is?"*

That little outburst had cost him dearly: five days of full bed restraints, revocation of bathroom privileges, and a benzodiazepine drip.

The second day of his punishment, Dr. Hubbard had visited, bringing with him a couple of magazines he thought Will might enjoy. He found Will in no condition to communicate; too blitzed- out from the drugs and humiliated beyond compare due to the forced wearing of an adult sized diaper.

Eventually, the drugs were tapered off, and bathroom visits were reinstated, but even then, Will felt like Humpty Dumpty; *shattered and un-repairable.*

"*You know Will,"* Dr. Hubbard said, the next time he'd come to visit him, the day Will had spent, crying off and on, "*what you went through-will continue to go through-well, that is one tough son of a bitch."*

His brutal, inelegant, honesty felt good to Will, like replacing a burning itch with a raw wound.

"*And I'm not going to sit here and tell you that you will ever completely get over it. Experiences like these,"* the doctor's large hands fanned hands outwards to encompassed Will's whole frame, "*Well...they change a man."*

Dr. Hubbard's hands shook as he adjusted the stethoscope around his neck. *'War* trauma,' had been Will's diagnosis, *'probably related to, but not limited to, torture*.'

"*That man, Lecter...he was your friend!"*

In the lakeside home, Hannibal is nearly done whipping the cream. He places some toasted vanilla beans into a mortar and crushes them; he sniffs appreciatively as their heady aroma fills the air. A quick glance at Will confirms that he is sitting quietly, absorbed in his own thoughts. Hannibal's smile is circumspect.

"Yeah," Will said, his voice harsh from a swollen throat. Dr. Hubbard nodded thoughtfully. Will took a deep, shuddering breath...and let it go. " *He saw me..."* Will confided, like a sinner whose confession is being wrung out of him. *"He 'understood me."* Will turned his head away.

'Mmmhmmm."

Dr. Hubbard scooted his chair over. When Will looked over again, the doctor was so much closer, Will could make out every detail of his tie tack and smell his shaving cream; Barasol, the brand his dad had used for forty years. He turned his attention back to the ceiling, but Dr. Hubbard could tell he was still listening. "*It's easy to mistake understanding for empathy."*

A warm tear had welled and trickled down into Will's ear.

" We want empathy so badly."

"*The first of my many mistakes."*

"*Maybe so,"* Dr. Hubbard nodded taking it seriously," *but considering the extraordinary circumstances, your empathy disorder would have crippled you from making truly uninfluenced decisions."*

*"My blessing, my curse,"*Will chocked out in agreement while a second ,then third tear trickled down to pool in the shell of his ear.

"Yes," Dr. Hubbard had said without a trace of pity." It's *hard and ugly to know somebody can understand you and use that power against you."*

Dr. Hubbard, thought Will looked especially young and vulnerable as he turned his wet, flushed face, towards him. He had seen just such a look on young men before; men who were dying or afraid to die.

"*When you see understanding just used as a tool against you, that's a hard thing to deal with."*

"*He was my friend," Will had said hollowly; his tone held neither praise nor condemnation.*

"He was...In whatever limited capacity his pathology would have allowed."

Will's gaze had become unfocused, and Dr. Hubbard had worried he might be on the brink of disassociating. Unprofessionally, Dr. Hubbard had felt a red tide of anger rising in him.

"Will!"

He'd barked and Will's eyes darted- up to met his. Already regretting his outburst, Dr. Hubbard had modulated his voic*e.*

"What you need to do now, young man," and to Will, the steely blue eyes had shone like beacons in a tempest*, " Is be truthful to yourself. It's a simple thing,really,when you think about it."*

Will didn't know much, but he knew none of this is simple.

"*Can you admit to yourself,"* Dr. Hubbard had withdrawn his gaze and studied his own hands, *"that maybe you're angry, because after all you went through together,"* Will had grimaced*," your friend...the one person in the world you believe understands you..."* Will had held his breath*," didn't just hurt you, but worse...left you behind?"*

Will had started, but Dr. Hubbard wasn't finished. "*And that you still miss him? Maybe even love him?"*

His words broke a dam in Will's reserve; tears began to trickle, then pour down his face.

"*If I did that,"* Will's voice was barely above a whisper, *"If I admitted to thinking about him-missing him, what would that make me?"*

Dr. Hubbard had startled Will by grabbing his hand in a surprisingly strong grip, and by leaning forward. Will's gaze had fluttered uneasily as he took in the blue of Dr. Hubbard's, irises, the dark rings around the blue, and the black flecks interspersed.

"Human," Dr. Hubbard had growled, squeezing Will's hand-hard. Will had grunted from the pain but the relief he'd felt from the words, was like being caressed by a warm wave. He had blinked rapidly, hot tears wetting his pillow.

Hannibal folds the crushed vanilla beans into the prepared cream. He pours the blackberries into a colander and takes them to the sink to wash.

"*You know what Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote about anger?"* Dr. Hubbard asked, withdrawing his hand and shoving it back into his lab coat pocket.

"*No...but I have a feeling I'm about to find out."*

Will's smile was rust; the first Dr. Hubbard had seen him crack his whole time here.

"*Hey!"* He'd growled with his own shit eating *grin, "You want to hear what the man had to say, or not?'*

"*Please, "* Will had acquiesced, and settled his head into the damp softness of his pillow. He felt so light he thought he might float away.

"*He said, 'For every minute you remain angry, you give up sixty seconds of peace of mind.'"*

A beat of silence, then Will had snorted his appreciation. Dr. Hubbard's mouth quirked upwards sympathetically.

"Glad to see you are still up to the math" he'd said, and gave Will's shoulder a quick, final squeeze before getting up to leave.

He paused and gave Will a searching, appraising look. Then he appeared to reach some conclusion.

"You'll be alright," he'd pronounced like a doctor who'd just triaged a wounded soldier still trapped on the battlefield.

Another warm wave of relief slapped against Will.

"*Now, no more nonsense. Get out of here, get your legal troubles in order... Hell! Find yourself a woman!"*

And though the advice was absurd, and antiquated, and boarder line sexist, Will had nodded sleepily, already surrendering to the rocking waves of sleep.

When he had awoken later that night, his body had known before his brain did; he was free.

A week later Will was conditionally discharged from the hospital, never having seen Dr. Hubbard again, not even to tell him, 'good bye', or 'thank you.'

The psych ward's walls folded downwards, and Will is back; returned to Hannibal's lakeside home, watching him prepare dessert, pretending to be his own eight year old self. Will tracks Hannibal as he returns the metal cylinder of ice cream to the freezer.

Not for the first time, Will ponders when Hannibal has had the time, or opportunity to make it.

How much sleep does this man need?

Suddenly, an arm appears in his field of vision as a bowl is set before him.

"Here you are! You have been very patient," he says approvingly. Will smiles wanly. "I have not placed any berries on it, but I did add a praline topping. The chocolate shavings will be added as the final accoutrement. "

"Thanks," Will says automatically, though he doesn't think he can tolerate sweets at the moment.

Hannibal adds a liberal dollop of whipped cream to Will's portion, sprinkles a spoonful of curled, chocolate shavings on top of it, and pats Will's shoulder before returning to his own seat.

Politely, Will waits until Hannibal is seated, and has re-draped his napkin before beginning. As Will eats, he listens to a smattering of Hannibal's earliest childhood memories: long, harsh, Lithuanian winters, snow drifts which reached higher than a boy's head; drifts which, according to folklore, camouflaged snow foxes and fairies alike.

Bedelia was right...under those plaid suits Hannibal is just brimming with whimsy.

Hannibal notes Will's drop in spirits.

"You seem quiet," he observes, eyeing Will over the rim of his wineglass,"did you not care for the dessert?" He ironically takes note of Will's empty dish.

Will shakes his head, "It's not that," he misdirects, "I'm jus' think'n 'bout my dad..."I miss 'em."

William is missing me, his sudden grief is a sharp jab in his gut.

Hannibal get ups to gather the bowls, "That is perfectly understandable," he soothes, "But I have a feeling you will not be separated from one another for very much longer."

Will is left to puzzle the meaning behind his words, as Hannibal shows him the proper way to stow utensils and stack plates for bussing the table. After the table is cleared, Hannibal begins to wash the stemware casting Will in the roll of dryer.

"It is never too early to learn how to handle fragile and delicate things", he says, handing Will several cheese cloths. After the stemware is washed and dried, they move on the plates, silver, and finally the pots and pans.

Hannibal is fast and efficient, and the kitchen soon meets with his approval. Will is folding the drying clothes when Hannibal turns to him pronouncing, "Bedtime." The bottom of Will's stomach drops away a little as he puts the cloth down and follows Hannibal to the foot of the staircase. Hannibal waves his hand in front of him, "Up you go," he says, and Will goes on ahead, back tingling, with Hannibal following close behind.

Will's antsiness, amps up even higher after they've entered the room he's grown to hate. Nonetheless, he manages to follow all of Hannibal's instructions; using the toilet, washing and drying his hands, all without fully closing, or locking the door. Following this myriad of directions, Will reflects he is getting a rare look into what sort of parent Hannibal would make; a rather controlling and fussy one, he thinks, so different from his own slap dash brand of parenting he'd practiced with William.

No, don't think of William, he warns himself.

"Teeth," Hannibal has appeared at the bathroom door again.

He waits until has Will begun the process, before walking over to ready the bed.

Standing at the sink, and using the mirror's reflection, Will watches Hannibal busily fold down the bedding and arrange the pillows. Will's hand slows when he notices that the

restraints, noticeably absent until now, have been re-attached, and a frisson of apprehension runs through him. He takes his time brushing and rinsing his teeth, switching between his own reflection and watching Hannibal's in the room beyond.

"*If I admitted to thinking about him-missing him, what would that make me?"*

"*Human."*

Who's left to care what I do, Will thinks bleakly. *The ones still left...they think I'm guilty anyway.*

"Come now," Hannibal is at the threshold, "time for sleep."

Will wipes his face and walks to the bed. Hannibal reaches his hand out, and Will freezes, confused, until he realizes he's being asked for the bathrobe.

Obediently, he unties the sash and the robe gapes open.

Hannibal goes behind to pull it off " You have had a busy day!" He remarks cheerfully, noting to himself that at no time during the bedtime process, has Will flinched. "Therefore, you must go to bed early your first night here."

He hangs the robe on the bathroom door's hook then looks down at Will's feet," Slippers please."

Feeling like he's losing at a game of strip poker, Will kicks off his slippers and watches Hannibal situate them heels facing inward beside the bed. Hannibal straightens, and clasps his hands in front of him. "Up you go! Into bed."

Hot tears prink behind Will's eyelids as he climbs past the dangling restraints, and settles against the pillows.

"*I let you know me, see me," Hannibal' eyes has been glossy with tears. " I gave you a rare gift, but you didn't want it."*

I wanted it, Will admits, as he rests his back against the headboard, *I just wasn't sure, then, if I was ready for it.*

Will pulls his knees up to his chest, looking childlike in appearance; *William is going to bed now too.*

"*We want empathy so badly."*

Dr. Hubbard's words echo in Will's head.

To Hannibal, a trick of the light has transformed the figure on the bed; it is no longer, Will, but William, huddled against the pillows, watching him with enormous blue eyes rimmed all around with lashes. Surprised, Hannibal blinks, and it is Will once more.

"Hannibal."

If Hannibal is surprised, he doesn't show it. *Smug bastard!*

"Hello Will... It's nice to see you again."

Chapter End Notes

eeeekkk! I've commited to hannigram...and it took, what, only 17 chapters? I hope I did an ok job of 'turning' Will!!! Please let me know what you thiink.
I tried so hard to keep Hannibal and Will IC *runs and hides*

"Shiva" A period of seven days' formal mourning for the dead, beginning immediately after the funeral
-if I used the term incorrectly, please excuse me. I was just trying to convey Will's belief that he was, essentially, dead to the world.

I chose Hubbard because that seemed like a nursery rhyme Will would have remembered (being about a dog and all)

Old Mother Hubbard
Went to the cupboard
To get her poor dog a bone;
But when she came there
The cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog had none.

Acceptance

Chapter Summary

Will is back with Hannibal, back where he belongs.

Chapter Notes

A teeny tiny update...Hannibal is so ready to take Will somewhere nice and warm... descriptions of Hannibal's sultry eye f'ing, borrowed from "The Silence of the Lambs" as always mistakes/typos are mine.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Happiness can exist only in acceptance.

George Orwell

_____

Will lowers his gaze and shakes his head.

"When did you know?" He asks peering sheepishly up through his lashes. Hannibal, weighs his options and decides to be bold; he sits at the end of the bed. Will's demeanor doesn't change.

"After your bath."

"The windows." Will shakes his head ruefully.

"That," Hannibal smiles, "and it would have been highly unlikely that a child would have failed to remark upon such a large scar inexplicably found upon his person."

"Mere speculation on your part, Dr. Lecter," Will says, with a barely there smile, "that is some sloppy psychology." For all the twisted mess this is, Will finds it a relief to speak as they once did.

Hannibal bows his head in a show of mock humility. Then he raises his eyes; their darkness holds Will whole. "If I had come to your home and asked you to come with me?" Will's breath catches in his throat. "Would you have ?"

Will's eyes shimmer, his face tightens."

William... I still...feel him." Hannibal's eyes glitter with interest, "Is he... alive?"

Hannibal's eyes reflect the lamps light and the point of light seemed to fly like sparks to his center.

"Did you enjoy fatherhood? " Hannibal's use of the past tense doesn't escape Will's notice; he concludes, that for now, this is how it's going to be between them."Was it everything you hoped it would be?"

"It was...challenging at first, then better than I could ever of imagined."

Will's mouth trembles and draws downwards, changing the structure of his face.

"Is he really dead?" He whispers, his pain is so visceral, Hannibal tastes it, like ashes on his tongue.

"William is gone." *You are beautiful,* Hannibal thinks admiringly, *glittering, sparkling.* "He found and loaded his mother's gun, discharging it with disastrous effects."

Will sits up straighter, "He gave you your injury! Didn't he?"

Hannibal is caught off guard when Will lunges forward, grasping the wrist of Hannibal's damaged arm in a bruising twist. Will's face is mere inches away from Hannibal's, teeth bared in a snarl the other man has only experienced once before; Hannibal smells salt, mint, pecans, and milled soap. "Did you kill William," Will growls in such a deeply feral voice, Hannibal's whole core tightens with what could be considered desire. He subverts an impulse to stretch and arch his body into Will's.

"I did not," he states boldly even as Will's hand tightens and he hears his own tendons crackle in protest. Will's eyes are molten blue flames, scorching the brown earth of Hannibal's own.

Will releases his hold but not his scrutiny. Hannibal's whole arm throbs, but he would not move to tend to it for the world. The world has been telescoped, down to this moment, this room, this bed, this man before him.

For one of the few times during his adult life, Hannibal has no idea what will happen next.

"I don't know," Will says tremulously, the blue flame of his eyes extinguished with sudden tears, "if I can ever forgive you."

"I forgive you Will."

Will believes him.

"I don't ..." Will looks to him like a drowning man who can't quite reach a lifeline in choppy waters. " I don't know... who I am," Will strains to get the words out,as Hannibal worships him, it's gorgeous, watching Will shatter, "or...even what I am...right now." Will gasps; the drowning man's head has submerged below the surface.

"You're with me," Hannibal yanks the dying man upwards; up towards light and life.

Will nods and closes his eyes; the tension leaving his body.

Then, Hannibal wants to laugh, and growl, and rend, all while stripping naked and rolling like a jungle cat in this glorious moment.

Because Will, *his Will*, is with him now.

"I don't have to..." Hannibal probes, as he laces the fingers of his right hand through Will's whose eyes remain shut, but who returns the pressure," but, I can strap you down, tonight, if you need it."

At this, Will's eyes pop open, darting upwards with a quick flicker of fear. Hannibal keeps his gaze steadfast and gently, softly, rubs his thumb along Will's wrist.

"I...I..."Will stutters then stops. He looks pleadingly at Hannibal, who understands.

"It's alright Will" he says, taking control by gently taking Will's wrist and threading it through the restraint. Will squeezes his eyes shut again, allowing himself to be secured. He appreciates Hannibal for not making him explain his need; to be slowly eased into his new reality, to have his power taken away.

It helps assuage the guilt.

"Do you need something to help you sleep?" Hannibal asks after Will is secured and covered by the bed clothes.

"Yes, please," Will says, looking at him with liquid blue eyes, and Hannibal smiles because he would not have predicted Will would have chosen this option.

"Very well," he says, "excuse me, I shall be back shortly," and he walks out of the room and to the large hall closet which serves as a dispensary. Before opening it's mini fridge, he glances back into the bedroom and what he sees, halts his movements. Will is spread upon the bed, in profile, like a carving of a crusader on a sarcophagus.

Beautiful.

Hannibal retrieves the sedative, syringe and alcohol pads and returns to the bedroom, but Will is already asleep; dark lashes fanned against pink cheeks, short waves of brown curls spiked up against his pillow. Hannibal's body thrums with power and possessiveness as he leans against the bed. He lowers himself until his face hovers inches away from Will's. He is so close; he feels the soft movement of Will's breath.

Will stirs.

"Manija asmens" Hannibal murmurs softly so as not to wake the sleeper; his obsession.

Chapter End Notes

So...who's ready to ship our two boys off to a coconut island? Raise your hand.

Your kudos grabs a tablet and starts researching vacation rentals-pronto.
Your comments get to help Hannibal shop for Will's
'barely there' vacation togs. ;0)

Coffee Klatch

Chapter Summary

Will wakes up, a free man...is Hannibal right about him?

Chapter Notes

OK, so this is where attempting to remain IC and not go into the realm of AU all that jazz becomes really difficult...this is where the rubber meets the road -so if you have any suggestions, please throw them out there...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day 21: Hannibal's house, Virginia

Will awakens the next morning in stages. He's been smelling coffee in his dreams for a while now, and he smiles, burrowing his head deeper into his pillow. As his sleep cycles change, he begins to feel the solidity of his own body; it feels warm and relaxed. Then, the realization of where he is pours into him like a red torrent, and his eyes snap open. He is lying on his side, on the hospital bed, facing the doorway. He turns over to see the windows; their tinted panes cast a grayish glow into the room, like moonlight. But the brightness he glimpses outside confirms it is not night, nor fully day either.

I am in an unknown location with Hannibal Lecter and it is morning...and I ...he pushes himself up onto his elbows, *I am no longer restrained.*

He looks left. *The door is open*.

This must be where his dream-coffee smell has been emanating from. Will pushes the bed clothes down and sniffs; the nutty scent of coffee is mixing with the scents of roasted peppers, and warm dough.

Hannibal is cooking me breakfast. How does that make me feel? Happy? Safe? Trapped?

He grimaces when he sees the nanny cam and facetiously salutes it. Then he sits all the way up and swings his legs over the side of the bed. They dangle there for a moment, causing him to feel a wave of childlike diminutiveness. He frowns and hops down, toeing his feet into his slippers and walks to the bathroom to take a leak.

*I'm not a child,*he admonishes himself, as he stands before the toilet. *I'm not a victim, I'm here because...*' Will doesn't finish the thought. He is still attempting to sort through his memories of last night. He flushes the toilet, washes and dries his hands then grabs the robe off the hook. He casts a sidelong glance at the monitor as he passes through the bedroom's threshold.

Ready or not, here I come, he thinks, as he walks down the hallway, yanking the sash into a knot; for all intents and purposes, a free man.

Just as he had the day before, Will enters the kitchen to the sights and smells of Hannibal's cooking. He relaxes a bit when he sees Hannibal is, himself, still clad in pajamas and robe.

Hannibal turns to look at Will while something in the large cast iron skillet pops and sizzles.

Hannibal seems, Will analyzes, *pleasantly surprised...delighted even*. "Good morning."

"Good morning, Will!" Hannibal greets him, turner in hand as he enters the room. "You look well rested." He smiles proprietarily, and gestures to the siphon coffee maker Will remembers from the Baltimore home. "Please, help yourself to coffee while I finish here."

Will walks over and finds two cups and saucers next to the globe containing brewed coffee. The ritual of coffee triggers a concern.

"Where are my dogs by the way?" He asks, ashamed he has never thought to inquire before. "I'm assuming you drugged, rather than killed them."

Hannibal masks his irritation at Will's loyalties; he wishes to soothe the man's fears.

"They were given a mild sedative, yes, and eventually brought to a local, 'no kill' shelter," he confirms, hoping this will be the end of Will's concern for his furry, former, companions. They have bigger issues to discuss.

Will relaxes after hearing Hannibal's assurances about his dog family though, he still wonders if he will ever see any of them again. "Good," he says," thank you for not hurting them."

"Of course," Hannibal says, pretending to sound offended but Will knows better. He turns his attention back to the coffee,

"This smells great...would you like some?" Will is astonished at how quickly he is adapting to domesticity with Hannibal, the thought gives him pause. From across the island, Hannibal savors one of his favorite sights; the play of emotions over Will Graham's face.

'*Sėdi kaip pabučiuotas*" he thinks, recalling the phrase his aunties used whenever they found a young Hannibal daydreaming- '*Sitting like they were just kissed.'*

"Yes, I would, thank you," Hannibal replies, breaking into Will's train of thought. Will's eyes dart quickly to him and then back to the machine. He places the first cup under the spigot, then glances back over at Hannibal.

Then he wishes he hadn't.

Hannibal is standing, completely still, watching him with total absorption.

"What is it?" He asks, brows knitting. When Hannibal doesn't respond, Will looks down again, and turns the spigot. Steam billows up from the rich, brown stream, and he moves to avoid it's column.

No wonder my face feels hot, he tells himself, then dares a peek back at Hannibal, *Whoa...did I do, or say something last night...I mean...what is that look he's giving me?*

Will quickly brings the cup up to his lips,affecting nonchalance.

"Ow, shit!"

Will's burned his tongue.

He jerks the cup away, causing the hot liquid to slosh over it's brim and onto his fingers.

"Owww!" He huffs again, feeling idiotic. Hannibal chuckles and turns back to his cooking.

Will, grimacing from pain and embarrassment, blows on his hand until the pain recedes into a dull ache. He pours a cup for Hannibal, grateful that the doctor isn't insisting he run cold water over the burn, or worse, attend to it himself. But no, Hannibal is either too busy, or is purposely ignoring Will.

Will relaxes, takes another sip, and hums his approval; he can't remember the last time he's had coffee.

Back at the range, Hannibal is breaking an egg into a hole cut from a slice of peasant bread he's been frying in olive oil and a dusting of fresh herbs. He layers red and yellow roasted peppers over the slice and then repeats the process with a second piece of bread already browning in the skillet.

"Did you bring this monster with you?"

Will points towards the elaborate coffee maker, as he walks over to the cook stove, cup in hand.

"I did, yes," Hannibal says, then directs, "Will, would you please hand me the bowl... there, the one containing the chopped herbs?" He waves the turner in the direction of the island and watches as Will twists around and locates the small ramekin. Will passes it to Hannibal

making certain their fingertips never touch, and Hannibal feels a twinge of something ugly twist in his stomach.

"Thank you," he says, and completes the final garnish. Then he deposits the slices, one by one, onto plates kept warmed in the oven. "Uova su pane tostato," he announces, "careful Will," he adds quickly, holding the plate out of reach of Will's outstretched hand, "the plate is hot and you have already burned yourself twice this morning."

Will's mouth drops open a tad at the quip, then he gives Hannibal a " *you really had to go there, didn't you!?"* look, before finally taking the proffered plate. It doesn't escape Hannibal's attention, however, that Will gingerly grasps the plate by the rim.

Will looks down at his plate, then up at Hannibal with mock incredulity, "Eggs in a nest?"

"Is that what you call it?"

Will gets the distinct impression he is being teased.

"Yes, well, of course that could very well be one of its names," Hannibal says, closing the oven door, "simple dish as it is, it is known throughout the world, and by many titles," he smiles. " I thought we would eat in the little morning room at the back of the house, it has a lovely view of the lake."

Will nods and turns to leave when he stops; he can't remember the layout of the house.

"Walk out the kitchen, through the dining room, turn right into the hallway and walk straight back," prompts Hannibal with amusement. Then he carries his own plate and coffee to follow Will's pajama clad figure out of the kitchen.

Chapter End Notes

I wrote the egg dish based on the one from "Moonstruck" then I remembered Hannibal had served essentially the same thing to Abigail...oops.

Quick Poll: Should I have had Will make a break for it as soon as he woke up? Does anyone think he's suffering from some sort of Stockholm Syndrome?

I take a stab at trying to answer why I had Will stay in the next chapter...it will contain talking, lots and lots of talking...I'll probably post it in a couple days.

As always, thanks for reading, commenting and kudo-ing.

TTFN-ta ta for now.

Wait...Why Am I Here Again?

Chapter Summary

Will is talking too much and not eating enough...this chapter in a nutshell.

Chapter Notes

this chapter is dedicated to cellia- the best non-beta-beta a writer could ever hope for ;-)

Hannibal's 'eye camera' taken from the book of the same name.
References to the t.v. show are sprinkled throughout.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day 21, Hannibal's house, Virginia

Will walks to the back of the house to find a small conservatory with a panoramic view of a lake which houses a round, glass table laid with utensils, fruit salad, and filled juice glasses.

OK, this is more than a little strange, Will thinks as he seats himself. He watches as Hannibal chooses the seat to his right and methodically arranges his cutlery, napkin, and coffee around him.

Hannibal's actions brings to mind Winston's habit of turning three times in succession before finally lying down; they smack of ritual. Feeling Will's observation Hannibal looks at him with a resigned expression.

"Will?" He asks impatiently, fork and knife already poised over his plate. "If you are planning a confrontation in lieu of eating, I will place the plates back into the oven," he glances ruefully down at his breakfast, "this dish is best when consumed hot."

"No, no," Will shakes his head feeling guilty, "that's fine. Let's just eat."

Hannibal smiles his gratitude as he slices into the toasted bread and egg dragging his fork through the flowing yoke to savor his first bite.

The man sure does appreciate his own cooking. Will soon follows Hannibal's example.

"What is your degree of familiarity with the Italian language, Will?" Hannibal asks, after several more bites; he helps himself to some fruit.

"Not very," Will admits."I took French in high school and college, Spanish for police field work, but... " he trails off, stricken with a thought. "We're not in Italy, are we?" He asks, regretting the question as soon as it's posed.

Hannibal tilts his head slightly, and looks disapproving.

"Really William," he scolds, and Will feels instant irritation at his tone," you must think me some sort of a magician! But to answer your question, no, we are not in Italy."

So, Mr. Machiavelli-graft-a-man-into-a living-tree, has the gall to scoff at me?! Will resentfully stuffs a large mouthful of toast and egg into his mouth. "This is delicious," he grudgingly admits around a mouthful.

Hannibal's brow furrows slightly at Will's table manners, but he instantly forgives both that and the man's peevish response.

"I'm asking you this because I recommend you learn it, as that is where I am planning to settle," he says, amused.

Will stop mid-chew.

"Hannibal," he begins, and Hannibal's lips quirk into a smile. "What ...what is al this?" He waves his hand to encompass the situation. "Why am I here?"

Hannibal frowns at the question.

"I thought we understood one another Will!" Hannibal prepares another bite.

"Well, I'm not sure that we do," Will counters.

"Well..." Hannibal intentionally copies Will's speech pattern, "you are here because I wish it," then looking directly into Will's eyes," and because I believe you wish it as well."

Hannibal has been briskly cutting himself another bite while speaking but he pauses before placing it into his mouth. "Though only fifteen days ago, you did tell me..." he stops, pretending discomfiture from one of life's truly savored moments, "that you would, like to, and I quote, '*stand over your lifeless body as I lick your blood off my fists,'"* unquote."

Hannibal grins.

Will purposely keeps his face expressionless. *Yeah, well, maybe there's still time enough for that yet, buddy*.

Hannibal senses powerful currents at work in his friend.

"Do you still feel that way Will?" He asks innocently,sampling his fruit. "Was I wrong in my assessment of you?

Will feels the menace lurking in Hannibal's tone.

"That depends," Will frowns, "on what your assessment concluded."

"Simply put," Hannibal says as he scraps his knife against the rim of his plate just he had the night before. *A habit?* A familiar tingle runs up Will's spine, *born of aggressive thoughts*? " That we are better together than we are apart."

"And you reached this conclusion... how exactly?" Will asks, placing both his knife and fork back onto his plate.

Hannibal frowns.

"Are you lacking an appetite Will?" Hannibal looks with disapproval at Will's still-filled plate," or are you unable to hold up your end at table and eat at the same time?"

Patiently, Hannibal scoops fruit salad into Will's bowl. Clearly *it will fall upon me to make Will's nutritional care a priority*.

Automatically, Will nods his thanks for the serving and picks up his fork, only to immediately put it back down again.

Under lowered lids, Hannibal watches with interest as Will struggles to keep his agitation under control. *Perhaps, a regimen of anti-anxiety medication might be needed,* he ponders, *just until he acclimatizes*.

"You didn't answer my question," Will presses, he is done with circular arguments and vagaries.

"You say we are better together because...why?" Will stubbornly repeats, prompting Hannibal to sigh resignedly and attempt to quantify the unquantifiable.

"We share a deep-seated respect and understanding for one another, "Hannibal's long, strong, fingers impatiently drum the table, "we have similar tastes; I appreciate the beauty of your mind, and you appreciate the uniqueness of mine," he sips his coffee, "our proclivities for violence is an added bonus which binds us together."

Will visibly blanches at the last item so Hannibal tries a different tack.

"Will!" Hannibal commands, and Will's eyes guiltily met his. "Please do not neglect your food. " He indicates the fruit salad. Here... I have taken the liberty of serving you some fruit."

Will absentmindedly spears a slice of kiwi but doesn't bring it to his mouth. Hannibal puts down his knife and fork altogether and leans his elbows onto the table, breathing heavily

through his nose.

How poor are they that have not patience! *Undoubtedly Iago was a man who would have known something of the matter.*

"I'm fairly certain, "Will snarls sarcastically, "that my killing one person in self defense was an outlier ... not my standard 'go-to' response."

Will has been waving his fruit laden fork as he speaks.

Hannibal disapprovingly tracks it's erratic course. "As well it should not," Hannibal says pretending offence, "we are neither of us savages,Will!" He gives the other man a hard look, " Though you appear to have remitted John in your body count."

Will's expression turns stony.

Hannibal blithely juggernauts onwards." But we both know that it wasn't merely the fact that you killed which has led us to this point."

Will's face further tightens from Hannibal's inference.

"When I told you..."Will's voice lowers, his throat tight from shame, " that I felt powerful after killing Randall Tier, "it was because I was so enmeshed in the Chesapeake's Ripper's head," his frown deepens when Hannibal's head bows in acknowledgement, "that my thinking, my judgments were clouded."

"And you have been feeling more clear-headed since that time?" Hannibal asks skeptically and samples the grapefruit juice; tart and sweet. *Very refreshing*.

"If I haven't," snaps Will, "it's only because of what you did to me. I still haven't recovered from what happened between us Hannibal."

"And what exactly did *'I do to you'*, Will, as you so eloquently put it?! "

Hannibal eyes snap like wind-whipped flags. " Show you a way to rise above your fears? To become more than you were before? To reach a potential unpolluted by societal expectations?"

"Is that how you see me then Hannibal?"

Will appears incredulous. "As your creation which can live outside norms and mores?" It's an ugly thought, but not an altogether unpleasant one. *What the hell is happening to me*, he thinks, ashamed.

"Yes," says Hannibal, not missing a beat, "and I know you well enough to know that this truth resonates within you too."

This has been, after all, the raison d'être for Will's 'therapy sessions' here.

"I have thirty federal indictments levied against me," Will says in an apparent, non sequitur as he stares without seeing the kiwi speared on his fork, "with a great likelihood of additional state and local criminal charges being added."

It appears Will hasn't forgotten John in his body count after all.

Hannibal smells his fear.

"Are you afraid of prison Will?" Hannibal asks, eating a selection of fruit; the mandarins are particularly tasty.

"Yes," breathes Will. He imagines himself, locked- up and helpless, in close quarters with pathologies and madness for the rest of his days. He knows his empathy would not be kind; eventually becoming his vivisector. " And you're not?" he asks resentfully.

"Physically it would be unpleasant," Hannibal acknowledges. He's looking at Will's plate and coming to terms that Will is most likely done with his food. *A pity.* Hannibal sighs, regretful of the wasted food. *But there it is...for as long as I've known Will he's never been much of an eater. He* toggles his attention back to Will. " But I have mental resources which would hold my interest and sustain me."

"Your memory palace," Will nods, remembering previous conversations they've had about Hannibal's elaborate adaptation of the mnemonic device.

"Yes," Hannibal says, wiping his mouth with his napkin and placing it beside his plate. " If necessary, I could live wholly in it for the rest of my natural life."

Hannibal gazes out at the view of the placid, dark lake. He blinks once, like the shutter of a camera.

"I have one of my own now," Will admits.

Hannibal's whole attention goes from absorbing the view to absorbing Will. Will feels suddenly exposed, as though he's been lit-up by a powerful search light.

He shifts uncomfortably.

Hannibal already knows of Will's mind palace, having filled many of its rooms himself throughout the course of Will's hypnotic sessions, but he is pleased to hear Will acknowledge it's existence.

"I'm glad to hear it," Hannibal says softly, his tone belying the intensity of his regard. "It is a very helpful tool, invaluable, in fact."

Will says nothing and both men are quiet with their own thoughts for a moment. Hannibal continues to eat with unperturbed enjoyment.

"When are you planning to leave for Italy?" Will asks.

"Italy?" Hannibal repeats, considering the question, "Probably in three months time."

Will's apparent confusion compels Hannibal to further elaborate, "Oh, I understand," he says, a smile playing around his lips, "I believe you have misunderstood me," Will's eyes narrow, "first we will go to the Caribbean," he eats his a final bite of eggs," then we will go on to Italy."

"We," Will says, his face blank from astonishment, "as in... you are expecting to take me with you?"

Why is Will is still struggling with this?' Hannibal grouches to himself with metaphorically gritted teeth. The *man's stubbornness is right up there in the pig-headed range*.

Hannibal chooses not to answer.

Will is going to have to work harder at this relationship, he thinks impishly, as he primly sips his own, delicious, coffee.

Not getting a response, Will withdraws into his own thoughts.Then, recalling 'the look' back in the kitchen, he asks tentatively, "And what...what exactly, does that mean...for the two of us?"

Rather than responding, Hannibal looks pointedly at Will's fork until Will shamefacedly places the kiwi into his mouth; he could be eating sawdust for all the evident enjoyment it appears to give him.

"What would you like it to mean Will?" Hannibal teases, eating his own fruit now to encourage Will to continue eating; a trick he had perfected on his little sister, Mischa.

"I believe we would be very compatible living together," Hannibal says looking surprised at Will's doubtful expression, "but... perhaps... you do not?"

Will's shoulders slump a little and his eyes dart around his plate before he realizes he is ignoring his food again. He quickly cuts another bite of eggs and toast, chewing and swallowing it as though it were medicine. He wonders if in a few days time, under Hannibal's care and scrutiny, he will be in any condition to manage an escape attempt.

As Will slowly cleans his plate Hannibal nods approvingly. *It's a start,'* he thinks, unaware of Will's seditious thoughts, *Will is coming along nicely.*

Chapter End Notes

I feel bad for Hannibal and his -excuse the expression-blue balls- but there it is! Will is not that easy.

Starlight mints

Chapter Summary

William and Freddie leave Muskrat Farms in a swirl of mace.

Chapter Notes

this chapter has alot of 'girl power' in it.

I totally get a Freddie/Margot pairing ...they are 'rawther' divine together

Sorry William-its only going to get worse before it gets better.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With my mother's death all settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable disappeared from my life.

There was to be much fun, many pleasures, many stabs of joy; but no more of the old security.

C.S.Lewis

Horse stables, Muskrat Farms

William is standing with Margot in front of "Cinnamon's" stall, holding a palmful of Starlight mints already sticky from his sweaty hand, when he hears the sound of a one-sided argument getting closer.

"Come on fellas," Freddie Lounds is saying in her most wheedlesome manner as she rounds the corner escorted by two huge security guards. She is rifling through her purse which they've just returned to her. " Just let me look around a little?" Freddie smiles sweetly and bats her lashes. William winces as one man looks her up and down; apparently there is a tack room way in the back of the stable where these men like to go and...

William focuses his attention back on the horse, attempting to block out the visions swirling through his head. A soft, brown nose is directly in front of him, and he feels the gentle touch of large, soft lips as they delicately nibble the peppermints out of his hand. Entranced, he

hears the quick crunch of peppermints and smells their sweet tang. Margot laughs as the horse nostrils flare over William's still outstretched palm, searching for more.

"Don't get greedy," Margot affectionately chides the animal as she rubs, its shiny neck.

"Margot!" Freddie calls, seeing her hostess. She turns back to the men, "Alright boys," her vixen act over, "if I can't convince either of you, then I'll see you around."

"Ms. Verger," one guard says walking towards her, and William feels Margot's anger and apprehension spike. " Mr. Verger would like to see you now."

Margot pauses for a brief moment, then continues stroking the horse's neck.

"He says it's very important," the guard insists, and walks until he is only a few feet from where she and William are standing, his intention clear; he will be escorting Margot upstairs whether she comes willingly or not. The second guard shifts his position slightly. The room hushes; all William hears is his own breathing, the sounds of the animals, and the 'scritch' of the groom's rakes as they muck out the stalls.

Then Margot smiles; a sharp, brittle thing and William feels the sensation of falling, whether it's originating from Margot, or himself, he's unclear.

"Thank you Lawson," she says, " I will say goodbye to my guests and be with you shortly."

Lawson steps closer and William feels a jolt of fear.

"I'm sorry Ms. Verger, there is no time for that," he says with false sincerity. William knows he doesn't like Margot, thinks she is 'unnatural', and a 'waste of sperm.'

William's fists clench and unclench as something ugly unfurls inside him.

He steps away from the stall and in front of Margot.

"Tell your asshole of a boss," he snarls, and Lawson stares stupidly down at him, "that Ms. Verger will get there, when she gets there, or I'll make sure your wife and kids find-out what you and butthead over there do in the backroom..."

The two men exchange suspicious glances, and William's eyes narrow. "You're already worried she knows. I know you are."

William senses he is about to be struck, so he ducks and scrambles around the guard. By the time the man has lunged at him, Freddie is poised and spraying both men with a can of mace.

"Freddie, no!" Margot yells as the men choke and sputter. Then she grabs William who is coughing from the fumes, and pushes him and Freddie outside, the men in stumbling pursuit.

The horses, upset by the commotion and the smell, are whinnying and bucking. William hears the 'boom, boom' as their hooves strike the stall walls, and the voices of the grooms as they attempt to calm the frightened animals.

William and Freddie sprint to the car, Margot easily keeping pace with her longer legs. She opens the back door and pushes William in before catapulting herself into the front passenger seat and commanding Freddie.

"Drive!"

Freddie floors it, the tires sending up a shower of gravel and has to crank the wheel to avoid hitting Lawson; though she still manages to run over his foot with her front tire. Both men jump to get out of the car's path as Lawson howls with pain.

"Are you coming with us?" William asks Margot, through chattering teeth, turning to look back at the two men; one now being supported by the other.

"Just to get you through the front gates," Margot says, as Freddie speeds down the long drive and pulls up to the large, iron gates.

A guard is already waiting there when Margot calmly gets out of the car.

"Open the gates, please, my guests are leaving."

The man instantly hits the control, and the gates swing inwards.

Freddie sticks her head out her window and catches Margot's eye.

"Thanks for the lovely time," she says bratily, then pulls back in when the guard's intercom squawks to life. A strident, staticky voice is shouting something William can't quite make out.

"Leave now!" Margot says as she watches the guard's expression change from pleasant to concerned after hearing the intercom's message.

Freddie guns the engine and shoots out the gate even as the guard hits the mechanism to close it again.

Shaking, William swarms over the seatback and lands with a thump onto the front passenger seat and hurriedly buckles the seatbelt. He knows, by law, he isn't allowed up here until he's twelve, but Freddie's never denied him access, and it's become his preferred spot.

Freddie, noticing William tremors turns on the heat. Soon, it's warm breath against his legs begins to loosen the hard knot in his stomach and he relaxes.

He closes his eyes, and tries distracting himself with the memory of Cinnamon's soft nose, and sweet, brown eyes placidly peering down at him.

Freddie's voice rocks him back to reality.

"What was that back there William?! You know how dangerous that was... for all of us?"

"Sorry," William says in a small voice, then adds sulkily," at least I didn't pepper-spray them, or run over someone's foot!"

"Mace them," Freddie corrects, and giggles a little." And I'm sure he'll just have a limp for a couple of days." Freddie turns serious again. " But seriously..." The woman nervously checks her mirror for possible pursuers.

" Why did you say that, to that guy?"

"I...I didn't like how he was thinking about Margot," William says weakly.

The rain, which has been threatening all day begins to come down in earnest, and Freddie switches on her wipers and lights.

"Thinking about her?" Freddie repeats, frowning. "What...like you could read his thoughts?"

William realizes he has let a major cat-out-of the bag and clamps his lips down tight. He stares out of the streaming window,avoiding Freddie's curious gaze.

"I mean treating her," he corrects himself lamely, hoping to put "FF" off his scent. *Crap*!!

"You can hear people's thoughts?" Freddie presses," or just put yourself in their place, like what your dad did."

"Don't talk about my dad as though he's dead," William says quickly and Freddie sighs.

"You know, you remind me of him, " she says and looks to see what, if any, effect her words have had.

William knows she's just currying his favor because she wants information, but he's so starved to hear about his dad, he grudgingly accepts the olive branch.

"Yeah? How?" He asks, leaning against the window but turning his face towards Freddie; interested but cautious.

"Well...for example, how you care about people," Freddie begins, surprising William, who hadn't expected a compliment. "Your dad always wanted to do the right thing..." E*ven when it got him gutted.*

She looks over at William, who starts and looks away.

Hmmm, interesting! "You have time to get some pizza before you have to get home?"

Freddie hopes to pursue this topic further, but William shakes his head.

"No. Ithink I better just get home. By the way Freddie?"

Freddie glances over at him, and is shocked by William's sudden turn, he looks furious.

"I really didn't like how you forced us to stay for lunch with Mason and that pervy doctor of his!"

"Why?" Freddie asks, guiltily. "Did they say something nasty to you William?" She darts a quick look at the boy. "I told you he wasn't a good guy. What were you two whispering about?"

"Nothing," William says shortly. Only *that he thinks my dad kills with Hannibal Lecter and when he finds them he's going to kill them both and...*

Suddenly, William can no longer bear his doubts.

"Freddie!!!!" He yells, startling her so much, that she jerks the wheel; the car swerves over the double yellow line.

"Jesus! William!"

Heart pounding, she steers the car back into their lane. "What the hell was that? I almost ran us off the road! "

Freddie pulls the car over to the shoulder and turns all the way in her seat so she can face William. Her heart is instantly smote by his look of utter desolation, and she takes his sweaty hand.

"It's OK, William she says gently " I didn't meant to yell at you, I was just scared because I thought maybe I'd hit something or..."

For the first time since they've met, William is seeing Freddie as an adult he needs assurance from, not like some teenage partner-in-crime.

"No, it's not that" William says, squeezing her hand, to show he doesn't care that she yelled.

Freddie squeaks. "Oww...OK, relax," she says, and William loosens his grip. "What's wrong, ladybug?" She asks without thinking; the endearment her dad calledher flowing off her tongue.

"Ladybug?!" William sneers, his budding manhood insulted, but feels instant remorse when he sees Freddie's hurt expression.

"Sorry," he mumbles. *Jeez*! Why *is this so hard?* "It's just that..." he stares out the window, so Freddie can't see his face, and she squeezes his hand encouragingly. " Do you really believe my dad did...does all those things you write about?" Freddie winces. William turns so he can study her face. " You know... kill people... and... cut them up, and..."

William stops, unable to go on.

Freddie does a quick mental tally of all the Graham/Lecter stories she's written over the last year, only stopping when she hits the fifty mark.

No *wonder the kid is freaking out! "* I'm sorry if my stories have hurt you,"Freddie says,with true sincerity in her voice. "A lot of what I write is...exaggerated truth...or, maybe," she quickly adds at William's worried expression," just a tiny bit made-up."

William frowns and pulls his hand away.

"The truth is, the juicier the story, the more readers I attract, and the more readers I attract, the more ad space I can sell..."

William's mouth has dropped open a little during this lesson in marketplace positioning, so Freddie hurries on.

"Which means the website makes more money, and...and..." she stutters to a stop because William is staring at her with an expression she has seen only once before, and that time it was on her father's face.

It's an "I'm ashamed of you because I know you can do so much better," look and it makes her instantly defensive.

Angrily, she shuts off the hazard lights, and pulls back out onto the road without saying a word.

Muskrat Farms is located in the country, a full two hours away from Jack's house, and Freddie grits her teeth thinking about the long, emotionally charged ride ahead of them.

"You're mad," William ventures after a few minutes of silence; no clear radio signals out here, and Freddie doesn't pay for Sirius.

Freddie smiles tightly at William but says nothing.

The truth is, for the first, and only time in her life, she's ashamed of her job, and it's not a good look for her.

"It's OK if you don't want to become my guardian," says William looking out of the window," maybe...maybe I should just stay at Jack's for now."

"Yeah," Freddie agrees quickly, confirming his suspicions," that is probably for the best... and William?"

He looks over at her, such a small and forlorn figure, she feels a stab of fear for him. *Maybe he's never going to recover from all of this.*

"I think it's better if you don't read Tattlecrime anymore. Take a break from all this?" She grins cockily. " Try just being a kid for a little while?"

William's eyebrows quirk upwards as if to say, 'seriously?' but he nods woodenly and stares out the window.

"Hey! How about asking Jack if you could bring some of your dad's dogs back to live with you?"

"Sure," William says flatly and without enthusiasm," that sounds great."

Then he rests his head back on the window and disappears into own mind.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading!!!

your kudos allows you to feed Margot's favorite horse a mint...*crunch crunch*

your comments make Margot so happy, she gives you a horse to take home...yippee!!!

The Shadow of the Valley

Chapter Summary

William returns home only to discover bad news awaiting him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Crawford home: Baltimore, Maryland

When Freddie drops William off at Jack's, he barely registers her speedy getaway; two cars are parked in the driveway, Jack's and Bella's doctor.

The doctor's not supposed to come until tomorrow, he thinks as he lets himself in. He slowly walks down the hallway, rehearsing his 'oops I stayed at the library too long' story when he stops, just outside of Jack's office, and listens. Two male voices are murmuring, then he hears something else; Jack is crying.

No!

William's mind fills with worst case scenarios.

" No," he moans aloud, and sprints over to the staircase and runs up it, two stairs at a time.

He reaches the landing, sprints past his room, past the second guest room, and down the hallway to Bella's corner room. He skids to a halt when he reaches her doorway.

It's just as he imagined it would be; the room is empty, the bed is stripped. William slumps to his knees, a loud buzzing in his ears.

"William?"

A hand is touching the top of his head. He ignores it, and it pokes him again, a little harder this time.

"William?" it repeats and William looks up and into the motherly face of the day nurse. " What's wrong? Have you hurt yourself?"

William feels like he should be laughing at the idiocy of her question because...can't she see?

Everything is wrong. Everything hurts.

"Bella's gone," he whispers and the face of the nurse knots, first with concern, and then comprehension.

"Oh! Oh no, sweetheart!"

William looks dumbly up at her.

"She just decided she wanted a little change, so she moved her over to that little sitting room...we're just washing her bedding..."

But the nurse is speaking to air, has been for a while, because William is scrambling, then crawling, then running down the hallway, through Jack's room, through the open French doors and into the little room that juts out over the back of the house.

Bella is here.

Here and sitting, upright on a chaise lounge, looking quizzically at William's shaky, breathless figure when he bounds inside.

"William?" she asks in her gentle voice. "Are you alright? How was the library?"

And he is alright, because Bella is alive, and here, and he's with her.

It's as though he has been given a second chance at finding his own mother alive, and the ache is so good he can't bear it. So, instead of answering, he walks over to where she is, flops on the ground next to her chair, and rests his chin on the cushion.

"William?" She asks again," Is there something wrong?"

"Oh good," the nurse says coming in, "you found her," she smiles conspiratorially at William, and hands Bella the glass of iced tea she'd requested.

"No," William says to Bella, casting around in his mind for an excuse for his behavior. "I'm just glad to see you," he says lamely, then adds more emphatically," and...it's just that...I'm not looking forward to school starting next week. Which *is totally true*.

"Shades of the prison-house begin to close upon the growing Boy," Bella quotes solemnly, and puts down the magazine she's been holding.

William smiles.

"I think you'll like it there William," she says, brushing his cheek with the back of her hand, "you just need to give it a chance, you'll see."

"I don't know..."William begins doubtfully, when he hears his name being called from doorway.

" Hey, William."

It's Jack. And though there are no remnants of tears on his face, William knows they're still there, hovering close to the surface.

"Why don't you come downstairs with me and we'll figure out what to order-in tonight?" He looks to his wife. " What did you say you wanted, Bella? Clam linguini?"

"Oooo, yes, and garlic bread," she smiles and William feels her relief; relief because she's feeling better today, more like her old self.

The new treatments must be working.

"I'm feeling hungry tonight," she says winking at William who laughs and winks in response.

"Come on then," Jack says, more insistently this time, and William reluctantly gets up, but pauses to look back longingly; Bella is showing her nurse an article in "Vogue" and they're laughing at one of 'the latest creations.'

William sighs and follows Jack out of the room.

As soon as William reaches the doorway, Jack places his hand on the boy's neck and walks him down the stairs. Jack's mood has darkened since he's left Bella's room, and William feels his bone-weary sadness.

"Come into my office, William," Jack says when he sees the boy hesitating by the kitchen door.

"But the menus are in the drawer by the frig," he protests.

"Yes, I know. I just need to speak with you for a second."

A thousand fears crowd through William's head as he trails Jack into his office; he knows he shouldn't be afraid of Jack Crawford, but he is. He's surprised when he sees that the doctor still here.

Waiting.

William's mouth goes dry.

"But she's fine," he says softly, " she's actually hungry tonight."

Jack and the doctor exchange looks over the boy's head then the doctor signals for William to sit.

"No," says William coldly," I want to stand."

Surprised, the doctor looks at Jack who shrugs and walks to the window; William can't see his face. Seething, William looks from Jack to the doctor.

"It's what happens sometimes to people... right before," his expression softens, "they die. It's called an 'end of life burst of energy', and in Bella's case it means," he looks over at Jack's stiff back," she has anywhere from a week to two weeks left... maybe less."

William gasps.

"I'm telling you this William," the doctor continues, "so you don't misunderstand, what is happening. Alright?"

William's lip curls; he hates this man. He wants to knock him down and stomp on him until...

"William," it's Jack, but he's still got his back turned. "Bella's brothers are coming in tomorrow," he pauses, " and even though they won't be staying in the house..." William already knows what's coming and he feels tears beginning to well, "I feel that...I think, that it would be better for you if, you moved back to the foster home...just until..." Jack's sentence is left dangling.

Left dangling, just like William is right now.

"It's important that you have a normal routine established, especially now that school's..."

"Fuck school," William rudely interrupts, and the doctor, sensing a fight, excuses himself.

"I'll call you tomorrow Jack,"he promises, walking past William and closes the door behind him.

Jack has turned to face William, harsh and angry words forming on his tongue; words about gratitude, and responsibility and obedience. But when he sees William, and how shattered he looks in spite of his bravado, the reprimands shrivel on his lips and he simply holds out his arms. For a long moment, William wavers between hatred and longing. It is only the look of hurt embarrassment on Jack's face that finally pushes William to his decision.

He walks over and straight into Jack's waiting arms.

"Please don't send me away," William begs, pressing his face against the buttons of Jack's work shirt; Jack feels as big as a mountain, and just as strong. He feels Jack tense, and then William is grasped by the shoulders and pushed backwards, just far enough so Jack can study his face.

"Just for a little while," Jack promises," and William is swimming in Jack's grief, "I'll make sure you..."Jack's face crumples, and tears course down his face, "I'll make sure..." he gasps, as his tears rain down on William's upturned face," you get to say goodbye." Then Jack pulls William back into a bear hug, and William hesitates for a moment before hugging back; offering the only comfort he has to give a man he still has reasons to hate, but is willing to forgive, for the sake of the woman they both love.

Chapter End Notes

If any of you could take a moment and let me know what you think of this story thus far...I would truly appreciate it... is there anything you feel you would like to see addressed, or something that I've missed?
Coming Up Next Chapter..."Porn ho!" or "Thar he blows!" take your pick of titles.

Your kudos makes this just a dream sequence William had on the car trip home.
Your comments creates an alternate ending- Bella goes into remission :0)

So, here is a 6 degrees of separation thing...the scene where William finds the empty room is borrowed from "Little Women" which stared Claire Danes as 'Beth' the sister who, eventually, dies, who is of course married to Hugh Dancy :-)

"The Clue In The Old Boathouse"

Chapter Summary

Will refuses to take his medicine, so Hannibal takes him on a walk to visit his boathouse.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Day 21 Hannibal's Home, Virginia

As soon as Will has finished eating, Hannibal initiates the clearing of the breakfast table. Then they wash and dry the dishes in silence; companionable on Hannibal's part, brooding on Will's. Will's silence for the majority of the meal is not overly concerning Hannibal.

Silence has its charms, and it's certainly been a major component of both our heretofore solitary households. Living with Will will change all that. Pleasurable anticipation races through Hannibal and he smiles.

It is only when Hannibal holds out two small pills to Will, that their mutual silence is broken.

"What are these?" Will asks, rolling them in his palm for identifiers.

"A low dosageof Lorazepam and Paroxetine hydrochloride," Hannibal replies as he runs a glass of water.

"You're medicating me for anxiety and depression?"

Will frowns down at the little pills.

"Yes," says Hannibal handing the glass to Will who absentmindedly accepts it.

"What if I refuse to take them?" asks Will.

"Are you refusing to take them?" Hannibal asks, head cocked.

"Yes."

Will deposits both the pills and the glass onto the island's countertop.

Hannibal does not waste energy arguing. Instead, he simply heads toward the French doors and indicate that Will should walk with him saying.

"Come with me Will. I would like to share something with you."

"A field trip?" Will asks sarcastically, and wonders, if maybe, he should be putting more energy into an escape effort. He idly wonders if he entices Hannibal close enough, whether he could slam the larger man's head onto the island's marble surface.

Hannibal's lips quirk as he reads the machinations of Will's mind; he is not close enough for Will to launch a successful surprise attack, though he's not displeased that Will's considering it.

Damn! Will interprets Hannibal's smirk. These *drugs he's been giving me... I might as well be telling him out loud what I'm thinking.*

So rather than attempting anything, Will does as he's instructed, and follows Hannibal through the house, and out onto the backyard terrace.

As he walks next to Hannibal glances out at the lake; imagines sprinting to it, diving into its frigid waters and swimming to freedom. It's a 50-50 chance that in his weakened condition, his muscles would seize in the cold water, but... his musings are interrupted when he feels Hannibal's hand firmly grasp his elbow.

Will jerks in surprise and stops walking.

Hannibal stops along with him and scrutinizes his friend.

"Come along Will. This should not take long."

When Will doesn't move, Hannibal purses his lips.

"Oh, I see...you are afraid I am taking you somewhere to hurt you? Rest assured, that is not the case." His grip on Will's elbow tightens and Will feels his ulnar nerve twinge in response.

"Let go of me, and I'll come with you."

Hannibal instantly drops Will's arm and raises both his hands in mock surrender. They continue, side by side, down a flagstone path which connects the house to a little boathouse and dock. Alongside the small structure, a sailboat rests, upside down on a wooden stand, a power washer coiled next to it. Standing outside of the building's entrance, Will's nose is simultaneously assaulted by two unmistakable scents; bleach and lye. Hannibal pulls something out of the pocket of his bathrobe, turns, and hands Will a key.

"Please, Will, be my guest," he says stepping behind him.

Will hesitates, then inserts the key still warm from Hannibal's body, into the lock. The mechanism yields easily, and the door swings open; the chemical smell is stronger now, and Will's eyes water a little.

"You will quickly become acclimatized to the fumes. Currently, they are not at unhealthy levels."

Hannibal grasps Will's bicep firmly, whether to keep him from leaving, or to steady him, Will isn't certain; a mixture of both, he supposes.

Hannibal moves forward, a solid presence at Will's back and Will must either move forward, or be pressed intimately into Hannibal's body; he chooses the former, and steps into the darkened building.

Hannibal closes the door and they are plunged into blackness.

Dank air presses against Will's wide-open eyes; the room's atmosphere is both, close, and chilly. Underlying the stink of chemicals are scents Will associates with comfort and home: old wood, water, and varnish. He hears the snap of a lightswitch, and the room is flooded by the light of three, strong halogen bulbs; their modern design contrasting strongly with the room's rustic interior.

Will starts and jerks his arm out of Hannibal's grip; he's been led smack into the middle of a crime scene.

Bleached white bones grace a table placed in the room's center. Saws, knives, and drills are neatly lined alongside the display. Will scans the room for further forensic evidence. He sees an industrial sized sink, a new addition, a few gallons of bleach, and a painter-sized bucket of lye with a gas mask draped across it. But other than those anomalies, the interior is one of a country boathouse, complete with fishing poles, nets, and oars lining the walls.

"What do you see Will," Hannibal purrs, close to his ear. Will walks over to the arrangement of bones and gently touches the skull's dome.

"Whose is it?" Will whispers.

He gently runs his fingers over the skull and then moves down over the ribs; he can tell by the size it is an adult, but nothing further past that point. His hands trace the ribs' structures, up and over, down and around until he reaches the hipbone; Hannibal's cock twitches.

"Darryl Schuster."

Hannibal walks next to Will, who is still staring down, mesmerized.

Will frowns. The name means nothing to him.

"He worked in William's group home."

Startled, Will darts a look at Hannibal who is gazing intently down at a man's remnants; a pile of bones which only a few weeks ago was a walking, breathing man.

"The one in Georgia?"

Will focus returns to peruse the gleaming pile, then comprehension dawns.

"The one who delivered your letters! When did..." He frowns, "I never heard that an employee had gone missing from there...it would have been something the FBI would have pursued."

Hannibal shrugs and walks around to the other side of the table so he can observe Will as a backdrop to his art.

"I am not privy to the wherefores and why nots of the FBI's machinery." Hannibal's eyes glow with pleasure at the sight of Will examining his bones." But if they had bothered to delve more carefully into Mr. Schuster's past," Will looks up quickly, " they would have found behaviors and pathologies which should precluded him from working closely with children."

"Did he ever..."

"I think... rather...not," Hannibal says, smiling with downcast eyes, as he straightens an already straight femur. Will senses the man is reliving a pleasant memory. "But then," he says, looking up, mockly serious, "studies have proven that torture is not a reliable means of obtaining accurate information."

"You killed him to cover your tracks! " Will shakes his head. " Don't try and make his torture and murder out to be the outcome of rough justice."

"Ah," Hannibal smiles, "my Will," Will winces a little, "always the profiler... always the drive to understand, to quantify."

Once again, Will feels as though he is being absorbed, consumed by Hannibal's gaze.

"To thine own self be true," Will says bitingly, but he can't muster up anger about the man's death. He knows it, and what's worse, he knows Hannibal knows it too.

"But this," Hannibal waves at the table, "was not what you came here to see," his tone is playful and Will tenses.

"Oh, yes?" Will forces his tone to remain light. " There's more, is there?"

Hannibal smiles, "Oh, yes, Will... " the name a caress in his mouth." There's always more; a whole world-full to be precise."

Hannibal stoops down to grab the handles of a large duffel bag and hefts it onto the table.

Will hops back, as bones and tools are displaced and scatter in all directions. When the grinning skull impacts the ground, it's jawbone detaches, skidding across the bare, wooden floor to rest against Will's slippered foot. Shuddering, he kicks it away.

"What..." he begins but Hannibal is already unzipping the bag, and Will's breath hitches when he sees hair and then a face emerge. It is an adult male, bound, gagged, blindfolded ,and stuffed into the large bag. He is wriggling and mewing now in panic.

"Christ!"

Will startles, and Hannibal looks at him quizzically as he places a palm on the struggling man's forehead, gently caressing it. The prisoner freezes with the initial contact, then his writhing intensifies.

"Christ? Will?" Hannibal questions him while skeptically examining the bound figure. "This is not the Christ, Will," he says and crouches down beside the man's ear speaking sotto *voce. ″*I think, perhaps my friend is having a religious hallucination? What do you think?"

The man in the bag cranes his neck as far away from Hannibal as he is able, the cords in this neck straining; his blindfold is wet with tears and drool streaks his chin.

Hannibal frowns,and in one fluid movement, zips the bag up. The bag continues to rock and wiggle, and with a bored expression, Hannibal pulls it towards him while watching Will's face. Will watches with dread, as the bag tips, then hovers, then tumbles off the table and lands with a 'thud' onto the floor.

The room is silent.

Hannibal grabs a sledge hammer which has been resting, head-down against the table leg and without straightening up, looks at Will with a dead pan expression

" I never did enjoy bag lunches," he says reflectively, then slams the mallet with lightening quick strikes all along the length of the bag.

Will hears the sickening crunch of bone and cartilage, but before he has time to do much more than flinch, Hannibal is springing upwards, the hammer still clutched in his hand; the smell of fresh blood permeating the air.

Not even when he'd witnessed Hannibal slit Abigail's throat, has Will seen Hannibal as he is now; in full blood lust. Instinctively, he backs away at Hannibal's approach, only to discover he has backed himself into a rack of fishing poles. There is no time to consider crafting one as a weapon, Hannibal is right in front of him.

Hannibal's emotions wash over Will: strength, power, pleasure, and lust, they wind around, and constrict him, like a sensuous snake. Hannibal's eyes are dark and feral, his dilated pupils showing only of the smallest hint of brown. Will's eyes dart around Hannibal's face, then he swallows, licking and biting his dry lips. He hears his own breathing, rapid and ragged. Hannibal's gaze is drawn downward as he watches the slow drag of Will's Adam's apple as it raises and lowers; then as if in slow motion, he watches the pull and tug of Will's teeth and tongue. Will's pink lips slowly part and Hannibal drops the hammer and presses forward. Will feels the heat radiating off of Hannibal's broad chest and his breath is reduced to little puffs. Hannibal capture's Will's eyes as he slowly, and deliberately leans in and nestles into the exposed skin of Will's neck.

Hannibal inhales deeply.

The skin on skin contact is electrifying and Will's breathing stutters then stops; he's holding his breath. Finally, his lips part and he slowly exhales. Something about the action serves as a trigger and Hannibal, still nestled in Will's neck, slams the smaller man against the poles; some of which fall, jangling, onto the ground. Will's stomach floods with heat as his whole front is sealed flush against Hannibal, who swoops upwards, and captures Will's mouth with hot, rough lips.

Hannibal's tongue, presses against Will's lips and teeth, demanding entry. Moaning, Will opens his mouth, and Hannibal's tongue pushes in, needy and hungry. He grasps the back of Will's head, with one hand to hold it in place, then reaches down to jerk Will's sash off with the other.

Things are moving so quickly that Will, overwhelmed by sensations and emotions, feels his knees tremble, then buckle. Hannibal, taking advantage of the momentum, further pries Will's thighs apart with one knee, then pushes both of Will's shaky legs apart to stand between them. Will feels the shellacked poles rattle against his spine as his legs are forced apart, causing his equilibrium to shift, and he feels his own fattening erection against Hannibal's large, hot shaft, straining against his silk pajama bottoms.

"Breath," Hannibal says, smiling, as he takes Will's earlobe into his mouth sucking and biting it. Will isn't sure if he's breathing or not. Then Hannibal releases his head and slides his hand down Willl's belly to cup, and rub his filling cock through the thin layers of boxers and flannel pajama bottoms. Will gasps, and Hannibal chuckles darkly. Then his other hand slides down the small of Will's back and cups the firm globe of his left ass cheek.
Will's eyelids flutter as Hannibal sucks and bites his way down from his ear to his neck while finding his way beneath both his waistbands to roughly part his ass cheeks and probe his clinching hole.

"Wa...wait," Will, stutters

Hannibal goes completely still, his forehead resting on Will's collarbone. The hand cupping Will's erection tightens, but his left snakes out of Will's pajamas to rest on his shoulder. Then without warning, Hannibal slams Will hard against the wall; rods and nets rain down to lie, tangled around their feet.

Hannibal releases his hold and steps away.

"My apologies, Will," he says, coldly, control rolling down his features like an awning unwinding. "I was under the impression that you wanted this as well." He looks sharply down at Will's tented flannel bottoms already damp from pre-cum.

Ashamed and still breathless, Will says nothing because he's not certain if he, or his empathic connection with Hannibal wants this. But he feels cold and alone without Hannibal's body pressing against him.

Hannibal's expression sharpens.

"I see. Perhaps it is just as well that we stop, for the day?"

He runs his fingers through his loosened strands of hair arranging them back in place, then he pauses, and brings the hand which had touched Will's entrance to his face. Methodically, he smells each digit, then slowly, pleasurably, he sucks each one in turn; his eyes never leaving Will's face. Will swallows as he watches Hannibal savor the most personal of his essences; his virgin hole.

Will wavers for a moment, caught between two worlds; the one he has known his whole life, full of pain, and abandonment, with little hope of better things to come.

Then he thinks about the one he now shares with Hannibal.

At the thought of life with the man before him, the thousand thoughts and images racing through his mind suddenly cease and go black; staticky mayhem melts together until it morphs into a soothing, rippling ocean.

Hannibal watches Will's face change.

Will shrugs his robe off, and walks towards Hannibal; walks right up to him until he is able to smell the evidence of the other man's arousal. Hannibal's breathing slows, then stops as he watches Will pull his t-shirt up and over his head, his lithe muscles bunching and rippling over his body; his nipples hard, tight, buds in the chilly air.

Hannibal swallows.

"I do want this," Will says, and drops the shirt purposely onto the top of the duffel bag; instantly, the gray of the cloth is darkened by the fresh blood seeping out from the zipper. Hannibal watches the gathering stain, then he chuckles triumphantly.

Hannibal takes two steps forward and grabs a surprised Will around the waist, throwing him over his shoulder. Startled, Will bucks a little, before going limp in Hannibal's grasp. He watches as the boathouse, lake, lawn, and terrace flash by; and then he's in the house, and Hannibal is carrying him, caveman-style, up the stairs.

He has little time to wonder at the other man's immense strength, before he is placed roughly on his feet, in what must be Hannibal's bedroom, then walked backwards against the bed. His legs connect with the side and even as he falls, he wonders about the show of dominance Hannibal is demonstrating; this coupling more about taking, he knows, rather than a sweet sharing of what is offered. Will shivers as Hannibal stands over him, wearing the same hungry look he'd seen in the boathouse, but this time, there is no turning back; their covenant together will be sealed with Will's virgin hole.

His cock flaccid from the shock of capture, begins to fill again at the thought.

Chapter End Notes

Quick Poll
Do you think this was rape? I think some would consider it rape...what do you think?

Looking back, this is such a crack title for such a serious chapter, but a boathouse is such a Nancy Drew-ish kind of venue, I had to pay homage.

The bedroom scene is TBC.

The Coupling of Achilles and Patroclus

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal consumate their relationship with rough sex- not for kids.

Chapter Notes

Here's a stocking stuffer for all lovers of smut. Just a touch of character development, otherwise its just porny, porn, porn with a side of porn.

I've had little opportunity to edit this- lots of people peering over my shoulder- so excuse the mistakes!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day **21, Hannibal's house, Virginia**

Will props himself onto his elbows and studies the man above him. He sees Hannibal's hesitation, and feels his lingering doubts. Will's answering smile is enigmatic.

"I have to know something," Will asks, gazing, blue-eyed, up at his captor,"does this," he pats the bed with one hand while waggling his legs,"mean I'm Patroclus or Persephone?"

Hannibal walks forward until their knees touch, then he grasps Will's thigh with one hand,"I suppose that would depend," he says, gazing down into the blue-gray storm of Will's eyes, "if you consider yourself as my equal, " he pauses, pondering, as he tilts his head,"or as my victim?" He squeezes Will's thigh.

Will pushes himself up off the bed forcing Hannibal backwards to allow to Will to stand upright, but nothing further. Forced to push into Hannibal, Will stands chest to chest against him; his eyes flitting from Hannibal's eyes to his lips.

" I consider myself..."his eyes gaze deeply into Hannibal's, "adaptable."

Will lunges into Hannibal, capturing the other man's face in a bruising grip while he bites and sucks his mouth.

Hannibal feels the sharp sting of bites, his lips turning slick from his own blood. He grabs Will's shoulders and returns the favor, mauling Will's lips and nipping his tongue until they

part, panting,to study one another.

"Adapt or die?"

Hannibal counters,his tongue chasing the taste of their mixed blood across his lips. Will laughs but doesn't reply, and Hannibal frames Will's face with his palms, the better to examine the creature before him; Will has never appeared more alluring than he is right now, a dark spirit; meant to be savored.

Will feels Hannibal's internal conflict;the need to dominate verses the need to assure, to *seduce.*

"Can I trust you Will?" Hannibal purrs, his hands caressing downwards to rest atop Will's shoulders as he nuzzles into Will's hair and neck, leaving Will both vulnerable and aroused."We've been here before."

Will 's inner eye sees a kitchen awash in blood.

"And it ended poorly...for both of us."

Hannibal's slides a hand down to Will's groin; the man's erection is straining to get out of his thin boxers and Hannibal tamps down a desire to free Will's thick shaft, and swallow it whole.

Jack's disapproving face looms-up before Will as he feels Hannibal's strong, talented hands, stroking and grasping him through his unserwear.Will gasps and brings both hands down to the tent in Hannibal's pajamas. He feels the damp patch of Hannibal's arousal, the smell of sex permeates the air, just as the scent of blood permeated the boathouse mere minutes ago. When Hannibal groans and closes his eyes from the contact, a switch is flipped in Will's brain;he hooks his leg around Hannibal's knee and roughly twists the still healing arm, slamming them both down onto the bed. Will grabs Hannibal's wrists, pinning them up above the taller man's head, as he straddles Hannibal's pelvis.

"Shall I expect the courtesy of a reply any time soon?"

Hannibal's smile and half-lidded eyes hold no censure. In spite of, or due to, his lover's intentional infliction of pain, Hannibal's arousal refuses to diminish; his shoulder throbs painfully now, serving as a counterpoint to his thrumming cock. In lieu of a reply, Will leans forward and licks a path from the corner of Hannibal's mouth up to his cheekbone. Then he rains kisses onto the apple of Hannibal's cheeks, up to his eyebrows and against the fluttering lids of his eyes. He feels the soft brush of Hannibal's eyelashes against his lips as he kisses each of his eyelids in turn. Then, Will brings both his thumbs up to smooth along Hannibal's feather-light eyebrows and down the sharp angle of his cheekbones. Eyes closed,Hannibal pushes into his touch like a cat and Will watches in horror as his own thumbs push deep into Hannibal's eye sockets; blood and eye matter streaming down his sightless face as he screams in agony.

Will blinks, and his vision vanishes.

Feeling Will hesitate, Hannibal's eyes open a crack, only to close immediately as urgent, plush lips kiss a path across his forehead.

"When the time comes..."Will murmers, kissing every place his thumbs have caressed, "You can trust that I will become whatever it is you've destined me to become." He feels the pressure from Hannibal's erection pushing against his scar. "That is the only reckoning between us now, beloved."

Will watches Hannibal's gaze at him with feline languor as he spreads his palms over Hannibal's broad chest.

"Beloved," Hannibal repeats, running the tips of his fingers along the length of Will's raised scar, feeling a shiver run through Will's body. Then he reaches into the opening of Will's boxers and frees his erection; it springs upwards, flushed, and swollen, it's head glossy from pre-cum. Hannibal runs the pad of his thumb over Will's slit and brings it, glistening, up to his mouth. Will arches and groans from the contact;the last time he'd had sex was with Margot, and it had been nothing like this.

Will feels the muscles of Hannibal's body tense then bunch, as Hannibal's hands grasp his waist then flips them both sideways and over, trapping Will underneath him. Will grunts as his arms are pushed flush against him and held in place. Then, grinding his erection against Will's supine form, Hannibal licks, and bites, and sucks Will's nipples before working his way up his collarbone and neck, then down again, along his trembling torso. Will is gasping and bucking from the stimulus, and Hannibal stops momentarily to yank Will's boxers off. Then, Hannibal pulls and wriggles his own pajama top and bottoms off and settles back onto Will, kissing and licking his scar; laving it's raised length until it turns a darker red. He moves down Will's belly stopping when he reaches his nest of moist, dark pubic hair. Will strains to see what Hannibal is doing, only to witness his cock disappearing into Hannibal's mouth. Will's face goes slack as his cock sinks all the way into Hannibal's hot, wet mouth and then, down, down, down in his constricting throat. Will's whole body arches upwards into that tight, wet, heat and he knows his orgasm is close. He flops and gasps in an attempt to escape the ravenous mouth and a premature release. Hannibal appears to understand Will's nonverbal cues, because he quickly releases Will's cock with a wet 'pop' and grabbing both of Will's shins, pushes them up and out.

Will has never been splayed-out like this before, but he doesn't have time to reflect how vulnerable he feels before Hannibal's forehead is knocking against his cock and Hannibal's tongue is plunging into his entrance.

Will moans with pleasure at the sudden, intrusion, unlike anything he has ever felt. Will's cock is jerking and pulsating as sweet sensations spread and billow through his body. Then Hannibal thrusts Will fully down his throat while pushing a finger as far as his knuckle past the tight ring of Will's virgin hole; Will explodes into Hannibal's mouth, his body seizing as he screams from the strongest orgasm of his life. He rides wave after wave of rippling pleasure while Hannibal sucks him harder;fucking his hole with one, then two, then three fingers.

For Will, the pain of the rough fingering is mitigated by the pleasure of his hot seed shooting down Hannibal's tight throat; he groans when he sees Hannibal's throat straining to swallow

the huge volume of cum he's producing. Then, just as Will feels the pressure and sensation of his orgasm dwindling, Hannibal pulls up, to suck just his sensitive cockhead. Hannibal fingers thrust inwards, finding Will's prostrate again and again, as he furiously, sucks his cock, and Will feels the wave of a second orgasm crash into him; his body rocking and arching helplessly, Hannibal's lips,and tongue, and fingers working together to milk him dry.

Will's legs tremble ceaselessly,his breathing swift and ragged, when he opens his eyes to yet another sight he never dreamed he'd experience; Hannibal lining his own thick erection up to Will's hole and pushing in.

Over-sensitive, and too tight, Will bucks upwards screaming, as Hannibal steadily pushes in. He feels Will's body resist as he presses inexorably inwards, until, finally, Will's muscles are overcome and Hannibal spears into him; his heavy balls slapping into Will's ass.

Tears stream down Will's face as what feels like a steel rod pushes in and out of his convulsing hole. His internal muscles twitch and pulse in a weak attempt to expel Hannibal's cock; his legs cramping from being forcibly splayed. Then, Will feels a warm, flat tongue licking his tears as they drip down his face.

"Look at me beloved."

Will opens his tear-matted eyelashes to see Hannibal's face, inches away from his own, gazing down at him with lust,and love, and possession.

"Yes," Hannibal murmurs as he grasps Wills hips, " keep your eyes upon me," he adds as he pulls out, only to push in again. "I want you to watch me as I take you apart," he says ending with a groan; Will is so tight and hot that it requires all Hannibal's strength to maintain control.

Will groans and writhes helplessly as Hannibal slams into him again and again. Then Hannibal pauses, to haul Will up onto his lap, positioning him to allow for a deeper angle. He resumes his brutal pace, but now, his cock brushes against Will's prostrate with every stroke. Will is hoarse from screaming, and Hannibal, watching his flushed face and writhing body, has never seen anything more beautiful; Will cums for the third time, his cock pulsing weakly against his stomach, only the smallest dribble of cum escaping. Hannibal thrusts once more and then he is cuming; cuming deep into the ruined and pliant body of his lover, marking him on the inside as his own possession.

Hannibal stays inside Will until his erection softens, then he reluctantly pulls out, but keeps a hold on Will's shaking legs. He sinks down to lap at Will's swollen, red hole and Will whimpers and attempts to squirm away. Hannibal grasp on Will's ankles tighten; intent on licking and tasting what no other person has ever enjoyed; or will ever be allowed to enjoy.

"Mine," he growls," and Will freezes.

"Sadist," Will gasps, every nerve in his body overwrought as Hannibal continues to eat him out; too exhausted to struggle any longer.

"Mhmm," Hannibal agrees as he moves down to lick and suck Will's balls. "Sleep beloved," he orders and is pleased when Will, depleted and spent, actually falls asleep while he continues his ministrations. Finally sated,Hannibal lies down and pulls Will's sweat and cum streaked body over him like a blanket; his lover's head fitting perfectly into the crook of his neck. He strokes Will's body, gentling his tremors and whispering endearments before finally succumbing to the warm, velvet waves of sleep.

Chapter End Notes

So here's the thing...I think Will is struggling with his dark side- what do you all think?

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to Fannibals near and Far (and Sherlock fans too- if any of them are reading this)

Settling In

Chapter Summary

Jack discovers one of William's secrets, Will's dogs make everything better, Bedelia makes a booty call, and Will and Hannibal suffer a set-back.

Chapter Notes

So if you are wondering, the actions which take place are roughly 1 month apart from one another- sorry if its confusing...

One more chapter to go in this work. Hope everyone had a nice Christmas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Crawford **Residence, Baltimore, Maryland**

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Just before dawn, the day Bella's brothers are scheduled to arrive, Jack goes to wake William, only to find the boy already dressed and waiting for him. William freezes like a jack rabbit sensing a coyote; Jack is seething about something, his anger dark and complex.

"Are you ready?"

The man's simple words a stark contrast to the bubbling fury William knows has everything to do with himself.

"Yes," William replies, uncertain of which of his numerous secrets Jack might have discovered which has brought them to this moment; he grabs his trash bag full of belongings, and follows Jack down into the kitchen.

Silence engulfs the room, as Jack sips bitter coffee brewed the day before and William studies his bowl of untouched cereal.

Unable to sleep, William had heard Jack speaking on the phone last night, and had seen the light his window cast across the lawn. William had stood in his window, watching Jack's shadow as the man paced back and forth. At the time, William had wondered if it meant a break in the Hannibal Lector case; now he's not so certain.

Fifteen minutes before the social worker was scheduled to arrive, Jack dons his jacket, and helps William into his own. They leave the house, walking-outside to finish waiting in the front yard; Jack doesn't want a doorbell or knock at the door rousing his sleeping wife.

They stand, a little apart from one another, shivering in the chilly morning wind, examining each car which drives past them down the quiet street. Every now and then, William steals a glance up at Jack, wondering about the source of his anger, but not daring to ask.

Finally, a few moments before seven o'clock, they see a car slowly pull-up alongside the curb; William's stomach drops away as his case worker emerges, wreathed in smiles.

After the initial greetings, William is directed to, "Go wait by the car," so that Jack and the social worker may engage in a private conversation.

Dragging his bag of clothes, William complies, standing by the idling Chevy as the adults consult with one another in low tones. To convey his disinterestedness in their conversation, William keeps his eyes trained on the sky, but his outward appearance belies his inner turmoil. Two thoughts are raging through his frantic mind; first, that Bella will wake up to find him already gone, and second, that he may never see her again. Then, William recalls how Jack had promised him a suitcase to replace the trash bag, but had either forgotten or chose to purposely withhold it.

William feels like human garbage, placed out on the curb with the rest of the trash.

The adults finally part, and Jack comes over to say goodbye. Angrily, William shakes his hand but pushes away before Jack can attempt any further embrace, climbing, wordlessly, into the back of the Chevy. As the car pulls away, Jack feels a profound sense of failure flood through him; he feels as though he has failed Bella, failed Will Graham, and now, he is failing Will's son. Jack hunches his shoulders as the Chevy disappears from view; the wind is blowing colder now.

Work now, mourn later, he reminds himself, as he enters his warm, quiet home and shucks off his coat. Then he slowly climbs the stairs, steeling himself, for the moment Bella awakens, and he is compelled to tell her what he has done.

Merrill home, Baltimore, Maryland

The foster home William is heading to is familiar territory. He lived with the Merrill's when he first came to Maryland. Later, he had shuttled back and forth, between them and Wolf Trap while the courts reviewed Will's petition for guardianship.

A familiar sense of dread weighs upon William when, all too quickly, the car arrives at the Merrill's. *The Merrill's are fine,* he thinks, as he waits for the social worker to pop the trunk. *They're just not dad.*

William pulls his bag out, letting it thump heavily to the ground; the front door is already opening, the Merrill's have obviously been waiting to greet him. *That's nice,* William thinks objectively, *they're nice,* the voice in his head agrees. *They're just not dad,'* he repeats to himself, listlessly grabbing the bag and dragging it up from the gutter and through piles of un-raked leaves.

"Hey, there William" a hearty voice says, and a man's hand is relieving him of his burden. William follows the hand up to the smiling face of his foster father's face.

" Hi, Mr. Merrill."

The wind causes him to squint a little. He turns to his foster mother. Hi, Mrs. Merrill."

Social niceties satisfied, William, drops his gaze and stares into a middle distance as his social worker and the Merrill's exchange greetings.

"OK," his case worker says, after a few minutes, and places a hand on William's shoulder to rouse him," you're all set."

"Mmhmm," he agrees, his gaze rising no higher than her elbow, "Bye," he says, then watches, outwardly placid, as her car drives off in a cloud of exhaust.

"It's good to see you again William," Mrs. Merrill says, placing an arm around his shoulders, pulling him slightly towards her as they walk to the house with Mr. Merrill bringing up the rear. "We have two other boys with us now, brothers," she explains, as William passes a tricycle and bike on the porch."They're staying in your old room," she says, pushing the door open, "so we've moved you into my sewing room. "

She leds William through the living room, and down the hallway to a room he's ever noticed before.

"Thank you," William says blandly, as Mr. Merrill places his bag onto a foldaway bed, already made-up with a homemade quilt. "Thank you for giving up your sewing room," he adds for good measure.

Mrs. Merrill shakes her head, dismissing his thanks.

"Why don't you get settled here," she suggests, walking out to join her husband in the hallway, "and then come back out to the family room so you can meet the boys? You remember where that is, right?" She jokes. " You're not going to get lost in this big house...right?"

William shakes his head solemnly.

"I won't get lost." Then feeling their unease, and uncertainly, he adds, "I remember where it is," and turns his attention to pulling out his belongings from his bag.

"Just use the stacking plastic boxes for now, "Mrs. Merrill advises , noticing William looking around for storage. "We'll get a dresser for you in a couple days," she promises then gently

closes the door behind her.

Left alone in the room, William pauses in his unpacking, to perch on the edge of yet another, unfamiliar bed.

Dad is gone...and if Mason Verger does find him, he will kill him. He takes a deep breath. *Bella is dying and when she's gone...I don't want to go back to Jack's...Freddie...*William pauses, because Freddie is the one variable in his life he hasn't completely sussed out yet. His gut and brain warn him, 'don't trust her,' but his options are diminishing rapidly. *What about Nancy?* William pensively chews his thumbnail.

Nancy is John's wife, *widow*, William corrects himself, and he has always liked her. In fact, he had a feeling that John might have been visiting Wolf Trap with the intent to bring William back with him before...William stops himself, shying away from where his thoughts threaten to take him.

Angrily, he grabs handfuls of clothes, cramming them haphazardly into the plastic drawers. When the trash bag is empty, he stuffs it under the bed, then remains kneeling against the bed, thoughts of his mother stilling his movements.

What would mom think about where I am right now?

William squeezes his eyes shut in an attempt to remember his mother's features. Finally, her face appears, gazing at him with a troubled expression, then her head is pulled back and... panicking, William's eyes pop open, and he slams his fists, hard, against the sides of his head.

"No, no, no" he hisses, "please no," he begs, closing his eyes once more, attempting, desperately, to replace the frightening image with another, any other.

Behind his eyes, the pointy face of a dog emerges.

Buster!

Relief stilling his fists. Then another doggie face joins the first.

Winston !

William's fists unclench. In his imagination, he is being snuffled-over by wet noses; he can even smell their stinky dog breath. The boy smiles as he imagines himself running through sun-dappled woods, surrounded by shaggy bodies, buffeted from time to time as they run along.

William cards his fingers through warm, rough fur, curling himself up into a tight little ball, and blissfully losing himself in his dreamscape.

The Merrill's give William half an hour, before coming to check on him.

When Mrs. Merrill opens his door, she finds William asleep on the floor, curled into a fetal position, his fingers grasping the sewn coils of her grandmother's rag rug against his face; smiling. She quietly closes the door and returns with her husband, who scoops the boy up, and places him, still sleeping onto, the bed.

"We'll do introductions later," he whispers to his wife, as she covers William with an extra blanket," let him sleep," he says and they leave the room, cracking the door so they'll be able to hear him should he call out.

When William awakens, it is hours later. His room is dark, save for the light streaming in from the hallway. Groggily, he rubs his face and sits-up, hating the fuzzy way he feels after long naps. He walks out of his room, following the sounds of cartoons and soon comes to the family room. William stands at its threshold, observing his foster parents as they sit, watching t.v. with two young boys, already dressed for bed.

"Here he is!" Mrs. Merrill says, in the falsely excited tones adults use to raise enthusiasm in leery children. " Rip Van Winkle!" She jokes; William stares, her allusion going over his head. "Never mind," Mrs. Merrill laughs, then turns to the children sitting next to her. " Thomas, Kurt," she says, to the boys, who look to be around four and six, "this is William, William...this is Thomas,"she touches the larger boy's head,"and his little brother Kurt."

William dreads what his empathy is showing him about the two boy's history, and he forces himself to breathe before he saying "Hi."

Neither boy says a word, but the younger one sticks his thumb into his mouth before turning his gaze back to the television. Mrs. Merrill smiles resignedly at her husband who has already risen from the couch saying, "Let me heat-up the leftovers we've kept for you William, they're out in the kitchen."

As soon as they're in the kitchen, Mr. Merrill speaks to William in a quiet voice.

"Thomas and Kurt have had a rough time of it," he says and William nods understandingly. *No shit.* Mr. Merrill retrieves a plate from the frig then pours William a glass of milk while his food heats.

William nods his thanks, before gulping down the whole glass in one go. The cold liquid feels good on his throat, and he realizes with a jolt that it's been hurting for a while now; he wonders if he is getting sick. *That's just great!* Then he sits down as Mr. Merrill pulls the plate from the microwave and places it in front of him; spaghetti and meatballs, with a side of sautéed zucchini.

Yum!

William tucks-in without preamble while Mr. Merrill sits across from him, drinking a cup of coffee.

"We were surprised when we got the call about you William," he begins, then seeing William's startled glance, he quickly adds," happy, but surprised," and William looks down at his plate, appetite gone.

"Don't stop," Mr. Merrill says, and William half-heartedly, winds strands of pasta round his fork. "It's just that..."Mr. Merrill continues, " we believed you were so happy at Agent Crawford's... and then we got the call from Mrs. Denton...and then just last night she called to mention an article Agent Crawford spoke to her about... and now...here you are."

William's eyes shoot-up to meet Mr. Merrill's inquiring gaze.

"Article?" He asks, throat thick, "what article?"

"The one on Tattle-crime."

William's gaping mouth clinches into a hard line.

"We didn't see it, but apparently, it described a visit you and Freddie Lounds made to that man mutilated by his own pigs, Mason Verger?"

William feels like the meatballs in his stomach are as large, and hard, as cannon balls.

"The Verger's threatened a lawsuit so the article was taken down. "

Mr. Merrill frowns, at William's expression. "Is it true William? Did you visit that man without Mr. Crawford's permission? " Mr. Merrill shakes his head, "A smart boy like you? Why would you do something like that?" Mr. Merrill's disappointment is palatable, and William winces.

"When was the article online?" he manages to squeaks-out.

"Mr. Crawford called Mrs. Denton last night as a courtesy, but he didn't give her too many details."

Mr. Merrill doesn't like the look of William's eyes ; they look like two burnt coals.

"Other than warning her, as your case worker, that there was an article with you in it, and that it had been taken down sometime early this morning."

Fuck!

Jack's anger towards him this morning is suddenly explained. *Fuck Freddie!*

Mr. Merrill considers the stricken boy, "Is that why he sent you away? Mrs. Denton didn't give a specific reason you were moving in with us, she just said, 'your situation had changed.' "

"No," William says finally, "that wasn't it." *But is sure didn't help.*

"Well... good," Mr. Merrill says, awkwardly, dropping the subject. He stands up, thinks better of it, then sits down again. Ill at ease, they stare at one another.

Finally, Mr. Merrill clears his throat saying, "Finish your dinner William, I'll stay with you until you're done."

William nods, eating without relish to the cheerful background clatter of Nickelodeon emanating from the other room.

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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Ensconced, in a lovely rental home, Bedelia is sipping tea while reviewing her options.

Christmas markets in England, Germany, or France? Or maybe I should spend the holiday's here.

She turns her attention from her tablet to her fire,recalling with warmth the man she had met the day before.

His Christian name was Adrianus, 'Arie', he had quickly amended, when he introduced himself, asking if he might share her table in the crowded cafe.

She had acquiesced, but quickly determined he was more interested in her, than in the empty seat; placing her instantly on her guard. Arie was forty-ish, tall, lanky, with fair hair and piercing blue eyes; eyes which Bedelia had unflinchingly met with her own wintery-blue gaze. She wondered if he had been sent as Hannibal's proxy, too busy himself to pay a personal visit. The two strangers had exchanged pleasantries; politely on her part, persistently on his. Then, as she had began to gather her things, Arie had placed a gentle hand on hers, and asked for her number.

Studying the man before her, Bedelia had only hesitated a moment, before giving him one of her disposable cell phones numbers. Bedelia had left; feeling his eyes upon her as she exited the cafe.

When he had called earlier this evening, she had taken the call, but had quickly excused herself, telling him she was occupied with something, and would call him back momentarily; then she had immediately texted Hannibal.

Met 'Arie' yesterday, is he one of yours?
- B.

Hannibal's reply had come within minutes, in spite of the time differential.

Without further details, I am uncertain to whom 'one of yours' refers to.
Rest assured Doctor, I much prefer relying upon your discretion than hired spies.

I may soon require your presence here with regards to the boy.

However, and until that time, I trust that you will enjoy this man's company without betraying any confidences.

I will see you in the spring if not sooner.

W sends his regards.

-H

Bedelia had read the text; relief flooding her. Then she had made a cup of tea to drink while researching Christmas markets, but soon stopped; her thoughts continually turning towards more pleasurable images of Arie lying naked in her bed.

Then,an image of a man, restrained on a hospital bed, replaces her previous fantasies.

That's a buzz killer.

Frowning, she wavers for moment, pondering both the image and the text's final salutation, before opening up TattleCrime.com. She enters, "Will Graham" into its search engine; forty-nine articles containing his name are referenced. Bedelia selects the most recent one, provocatively titled, "Hannibal The Cannibal's youngest victim," and sees a photo of whom she assumes is William Wyse, followed by:

This article is no longer available.

Bedelia frowns, considering the probable reasons the article has been taken down. A few minutes later, she has found the article, sans the photo, on another website:

"I Just Want My Father Back": One Boy's Journey To Hell And Back
Part Ten of an ongoing Tattle-Crime exclusive series

Smirking at Freddie Lound's purple prose, Bedelia reads on:

'Recently, this journalist visited the sumptuous, yet secluded, ancestral estate of Mason Verger, heir to the Verger Meat Dynasty...'

Bedelia's eyes skim down the paragraphs until she locates the name she is looking for, " ...accompanied by William Wyse, ten year son of Will Graham, the latter of whom, authorities, believe, has fled the country with his cannibalistic lover, Dr. Hannibal Lector, MD...'

Bedelia reads the entire article twice through before shutting-off her tablet and walking to her bathroom. She turns the bath taps, shedding her clothes, as hot water fills the tub, then puts her hair up into a messy bun. Bedelia pours a liberal amount of grapefruit scented bath oil into the water then eases herself in; tensions melting away in the steaming water. Sinking further into the tub, she closes her eyes, the better to savor the memory of piercing blue eyes desirously gazing at her; it felt nice to be wanted like that, Bedelia thinks, cracking her eyes open to look down the length of her alabaster body, rosy now from the bathwater. With half-lidded eyes, Bedelia thinks of Arie's naked body, pressing into her own. She strokes her wet nipples until they become hard; imagining her fingers are his hungry mouth and tongue. Then she places her fingers between her legs, stroking herself until she comes, moaning and

twisting in the warm water, all thoughts of Hannibal Lector, Will Graham, and William Wyse, blissfully replaced by thoughts of carnal pleasures to come.

She luxuriates in her bathwater until it begins to cool, then pulls the plug, and steps out. Languidly, she dries herself and dons a robe, before settling down on her living room's couch; its plush cushions already warmed by the fireplace's flickering gas fixture. She returns Arie's call, and invites him over, *'a booty call'*, she laughs to herself, when he enthusiastically accepts her invitation.

I *wonder how one says that in Dutch?*

Bedelia's ponders, which wine they would share this their evening together. Or *Flemish, for that matter? Belgium is beautiful in the springtime. She* smiles. *Ah, well, Arie, will know,'* she thinks, contentedly. She goes into her bedroom to turn down the duvet and check her condoms supply; everything, and most especially herself, will be ready for his arrival.

Hannibal's Home, Virginia
Day 22

When Will awakens, it is to discover he is both naked, and back on the hospital bed. He janks at the restraints.

"What the hell?!"

Every muscle in his body is protesting, and his ass is both stinging and throbbing. His throat is parched, and from what he can see, his body is covered in bites, bruises, and itchy patches of dried sweat and cum.

Will rests his head, groaning softly at the memories of what he and Hannibal had done the day before.

I like sex...but Hannibal? He was insatiable. Owww...fuck...and why am I restrained!

Will lies on the bed, attempting to catalogue past events.

He remembers starting awake to the sensation of being roughly taken from behind as he slept.

That second time, Hannibal had grasped his hip and bitten into his shoulder as he rutted into him.

The third time, he awoke to Hannibal sucking his soft cock and fingering him. Will had writhed and groaned from the onslaught, the suddenness of his release ripping a scream from his throat. Then, before he had a chance to catch his breath, Hannibal was grasping his head and fucking his throat as Will chocked, and drooled, and fought for air.

Will moans as he feels his penis hardening from the memories of their debauchery. It doesn't help that he can smell cum, and sweat, and Hannibal's musk rising off his own naked body.

"Good afternoon Will."

Will jerks his head to the doorway.

Hannibal, amazingly, still un-showered, and wearing only silk pajama bottoms shares his own "freshly fucked look."

"I see you are experiencing pleasurable memories," he says, archly, as Will glares at him from his prone position.

"Why am I here!?" Will demands, pulling at the restraints.

"Merely a grounding exercise, William," Hannibal soothes, then disappears into the bathroom; Will hears the sound of bathwater running.

Hannibal returns and smilingly examines Will's bobbing erection,

"Though I appreciate your enthusiasm, I would like to bathe first."

Hanninal releases Will's arms from his restraints.

Blushing Will moves to cover his erection.

"NO! You will not cover-up."

Will laughs, in disbelief, a hard, brittle, sound. "What the hell is that supposed to mean? He sits up to unstrap his legs.

Hannibal studies him for a moment before swiftly capturing Will's hand and jamming his thumb backwards.

"Hey!!"

Will swivels in an attempt to free himself, but is stopped by a hand around his throat; tight enough to bring tears to his eyes, as he is slammed back down onto the bed.

Will can't believe it; Hannibal is choking him out. His survival skills kick-in as he twists, and jabs, attempting to break free before, finally, blacking-out.

When Will comes to, moments, later, gasping from a bruised and sore throat, he is alone once more; the bathwater is no longer running, and he is fully restrained. Even more troubling, Will sees that the IV poles are back.

Hannibal enters the room, rubber gloved, and burdened with syringes, vials, and bags of solution.

Will grits his teeth; in spite of the rising panic associated with the idea of another round of sedation and forced confinement, he is determined not to beg.

Hannibal's face could have been carved from stone for all the emotion it demonstrates as he disinfects Will's arm and inserts a needle.

Then he grasps Will's soft penis, and disinfects his genital area before inserting a needle attached to a catheter tube. He does glance briefly at Will's face in response to the man's gasp when the needle breeches his urethral opening, but soon returns his attention back to his task.

Will bites his cheek and glares at the ceiling as Hannibal pushes the tubing until urine begins to flow into it. Will continues to stare stoically upwards, even as a sedative is injected into his IV line.

The last thing Will feels, before falling asleep is Hannibal; speculatively probing his cuts and bruises as one might handle damaged fruit at a farmer's market.

Once Will is asleep, Hannibal showers, dresses, and returns to the boathouse to harvest the body in the bag; he hopes that the cooling temperatures will have protected the meat thus far. He pulls the body free and lays it upon his work table.

His hands, guided from muscle memory, allow his mind to range freely over the issue of Will's perverse disobedience. As Hannibal slices through the abdomen to retrieve the large and small intestines, he is forced to admit that there may come a time when he must relinquish his designs for Will Graham. Hannibal sighs, unhappy with the idea of ending his lover's life; though consuming his meat, would offer some solace.

He examines the liver and spleen before him, both appear plump and healthy. *If and when that day comes...perhaps the son might serve as a satisfactory replacement?*

Expertly separating the kidneys from their connective tissue, Hannibal reflects upon the nature of Will's son; inherently more violent than that of father.

In and of itself, violence holds little interest to Hannibal, but empathy, of the sort Will enjoys, that is something which Hannibal prizes greatly.

He strokes the kidneys, testing their firmness then sniffs them. Hannin ponders what a glorious thing it would be, to find in someone as young as William, not only Will's empathy, but a predilection for violence.

Hannibal plies a small hack saw to access the chest cavity and pulls the ribs clear; he studies the lungs. *Pink and perfect.*

As he extracts them, Hannibal considers Bedelia's current globetrotting location. He knows she is planning to leave France for Holland within the next few weeks.

Do I want the heart? No not this time. Hannibal pushes the rib cage back down.

Should I need the boy to be assessed...I will arrange for her return.

Head tilted, Hannibal considers the loins.

Marbled *and succulent.*

Hanninal feels a pang of hunger and begins to slice them free.

Inevitably, his mind returns to the problem of Will Graham.

'To bend but not to break… to yield but not capitulate…' These are the traits which Will must demonstrate to me, if we are ever to enjoy a life together.

Hannibal swathes his meat in snowy butcher paper and carries it back to his kitchen.

Chapter End Notes

I can't see Hannibal killing Will , can you?

the quote is from "Trouble with Angels"

The Last Goodbye

Chapter Summary

Bella's brothers visit. Will watches a teacup shatter.William visits the library.

Chapter Notes

here we are, the end!!!
I'm currently brainstorming the last and final part of this series.

For this story, Bella's illness progressed differently than how it did in the show.

Thank you for all the hits, comments, and kudos!!!!

And if you are an author, thank you for your works here in AO3- I've loved reading your stories.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

November, **Crawford home, Baltimore Maryland**

Bella is remarkably amenable when Jack tells her William is already gone.

"It's probably for the best, for now...but what about...after?"
Jack kisses her forehead gently, taking both her hands in his. When he looks into her face, her eyes are filled with tears; he blinks hard to keep his own at bay and clears his throat.

" I'm not certain," he admits, " it makes sense to keep him where he is."

Bella studies him for a moment then says quietly, "I'm so sorry we never had children. For your sake."

Jack's answering laugh is meant to be an ironic chuckle, but comes-out a bitter grunt.

" Baby, I have no regrets... about any of it," he lies.

"Liar," Bella says, her eyes still shimmering with tears, but her smile is tender and full of forgiveness. "Sing to me?" The oxycodone is making her drowsy.

Jack's mind flashes to the early days of their marriage, back when they made love constantly, and he would sing to her she lay in his arms. He hasn't sung to her in years.

"Yes?" He asks, pushing down his bitter ache. *Another day, man... not while she's still here, still with you*.

"'Summertime'," she commands, eyes closing. *Summertime,* she repeats to herself, brought up short by a thought which shoots through her like an electric current; *I will never see another summer day.* Somehow, even though she's known she won't last past New Years, this revelation has the power to wound.

Bella's sudden intake of breath, and tightening grip alerts Jack and he bends over her.

" What is it? Are you in pain?"

"Just here," she says, bringing her hand to rest over her heart. When Jack comprehends, he can barely make out her face; too many tears are blurring his vision.

"What can I do?" He begs huskily, hating his helplessness and the look of despair on Bella's face.

"Stay with me," she says, allowing her tears free rein. "Stay with me and tell me how it's going to be alright," she whispers," tell me that you are going to be alright."

"I'll be alright," Jack promises, wiping her tears away with his thumb and hoping with all his might that somehow, someway he would be.

Bella's brothers celebrated Thanksgiving with them, then stayed on into December. Intellectually, Jack knew Bella was weakening. Every day he watched her fade a little more. But it was so easy, watching her with her brothers, to forget how gravely ill she actually was. One day in mid December finds Jack and Bella's brothers assembling an impromptu lunch of leftovers. They carry their plates into the living room, intent on trimming a tree they'd bought from the Scouts that day; a surprise for Bella. Jack is digging through boxes, looking for the tree topper when Carl, asks, "What kind of arrangements have you made?"

Jack straightens up and regards the man, eye-to-eye, all of Bella's brothers are tall.

"Not many." He admits.

Lionel, sitting on the couch, untangling swags, looks up, "There's a place for her in our parent's plot."

Jack steels himself for a fight.

" Bella doesn't want to be buried," he says, turning to open another box. " Now, where is that damn thing?" He mutters.

"You could buy columbarium space in their cemetery," says Carl, jaw tight, from this unexpected development, " I could...."

Jack cuts him off.

"Bella does not want to be buried, or interred," he says, looking from one brother to the other. "She wants her ashes to be sprinkled at a location she and I have already discussed." He glares at his in-laws. "Then and only then, we will throw a small dinner party in her honor, just family and close friends. No funeral, no wake, no memorial service."

"That's crazy!" Carl protests, "what about her colleagues? Bella's career? Her standing in the community? Someone like Bella doesn't just drop off the face of the earth like that, Jack. There are rule of etiquette, protocol..."

Jack drops the box he is holding and kicks it aside with more force than necessary; they all hear the sound of breaking glass. Carl draws himself up slightly.

"No... service...of... any...kind..." Jack reiterates. "And neither of you," he points at Carl and then to Lionel, " will bother her with any of this," he orders.

Jack stares at Carl until the other man breaks eye contact, then does the same with the stunned younger brother.

"Does your sister have your support?" He asks, looking from one man to the other.

A few tense moments pass before the tension breaks.

"Yes," both brothers acquiesce, stealing furtive glances at one another.

"Good, "Jack says, and stands down. He gives the half- decorated tree a thoughtful once-over and turns back to the men, grinning ruefully. "Let's finish this fucker later. I think we could all use a drink."

Then he walks out of the room and heads for his office with
Carl and Lionel filing after.

On December 29th, three important events occur in the life of William Wyse, only one of which, he is even aware of: he turned eleven, Jack Crawford flew with Bella's ashes to New Hampshire, and his father, Will Graham walked along a white sand Caribbean beach.

December, White Mountains National Park, New Hampshire

Jack switches his lights on as he navigates a twisting mountain road in the White Mountains. As per Bella's final instructions, he was revisiting a vista point in the national park to illegally sprinkle her ashes.
Jack and Bella had spent one of their anniversaries, leaf-peeping in this area and Jack's destination had been one of their favorite hikes. He parks his rental car at the trailside and begins his descent.
Which anniversary was it? He tries to recall as he slips and slides down the muddy track.

Third, fourth?

They had visited in late September and the views had been breathtaking. They had hiked down to the waterfall then stood, soaking up the view. Jack had turned to say something when he saw something that left him breathless. Bella was gone. In her place stood an illuminated, otherworldly creature, gilded and burnished by golden light.

Jack holds his image of Bella in his mind as he reaches his journey's end. Clutching her urn in his hands, he watches the waterfall tumble for a while, then turns to look out at the view.

The wind feels so much colder now than it did then.

The deciduous trees are stark, their bright colors have been gone for months now.

Jack smells snow in the wind.

Slowly he unscrews the lid of the urn and walks towards the cliff edge. He looks to his left, thinking, maybe, just maybe,he might see Bella again in this magical place, but of course, he is alone. He waits for a lull in the wind then shakes the container up and away; emptying its contents.
Nearby, a hawk is calling, as Bella is caught by the wind. She is swirling in an updraft, and suddenly, Jack finds he is on his knees.
Everything that was Bella, her warm eyes, the sensuous curve of her lips, and breasts, and hips, has been reduced to a powdery cloud eddying away on the dusk's currents.

Then, the air is clear, Bella is gone.

Jack strains to catch a glimpse of her as he looks across the expanse of hills and valleys.

Nothing is left.

Then Jack imagines how easy it would be to stand up, walk all the way to the edge...then...fall...a slow motion tumble, wind rushing in one's ears, the approaching rocks rushing towards you until...

Jack lurches, swaying to his feet, clutching the empty urn. An ocean of mist is filling the hollows and valleys below. The hills and distant horizon are hazy layers of pink, rose, blue and indigo. A snow-kissed wind caresses his tear streamed face.
"Goodbye Bella," he says then waits another moment before turning to go, mindful of the time. The gates close at sunset and he must hurry or risk getting locked-in.
Looking ahead, Jack sees that his path up the mountain has transformed into a solid black tunnel, stretching endlessly up before him. He settles the urn in the crook of his arm and begins to climb.

On his drive back to the airport Holiday Inn, Jack stops at a 7-Eleven and buys a fifth of bourbon. He figures he can indulge; his flight isn't until six the next evening.

He returns to his room, not bothering with the lights, preferring to drink in the sheltering darkness.

He sits by the window, listening to the shriek and roar of jets passing overhead.

For the first time in days, he thinks about Will Graham and wonders if he is still alive. He raises his plastic cup, "To Bella and to absent friends," he toasts, draining it. Then, slowly, still in his wet and muddied clothes, Jack crawls into bed.

Day 26, Hannibal's home, Virginia

Hannibal is in Will's room, waiting for the exact moment the sleeping man will open his eyes.

Will is my lover now.

The thought is as sweet as honey on the tongue and as intoxicating as absinthe. Hannibal stands beside Will's bed, observing the small movements which intimate waking: fluttering eyelids, the twitch and roll of muscles, the stiffening of limbs as consciousness brings awareness until...Will's eyes snap open, instantly returning Hannibal's gaze.

"Good afternoon Will."

"Good afternoon, Doctor Lecter," Will replies, taking Hannibal's word for it.

"It is rather late for breakfast, but if you would prefer breakfast to lunch, that can be arranged." Hannibal says as he loosens the restraints.

"Such politeness." Will shakes his head. "How long have I been out?" Wincing, he eases his neck and shoulder and sits up. His throat still aches.

"Yes, about that," Hannibal says, offering his hand to assist Will from the bed. Instead of taking it, Will swings his legs off the bed. Hannibal frowns and feels a twinge of regret.

"I apologize for my previous actions," he says, hand still outstretched.

"Which, ones, specifically are you are apologizing for?" Will asks, not taking it.

"The ones which caused you pain," Hannibal says, meaning it.

Will smiles.

"So, basically, all of them then."

Will takes the proffered hand.

Hannibal laughs with relief and pulls him slowly up off the bed.
Hannibal's arousal surges as he pulls Will to a standing position. This close, Will is more alluring than Hannibal could ever have anticipated. Over the last few days, Hannibal has surprised himself by how ardent his sexual attraction to Will has become. Will blinks and steps backwards.

Inwardly, Hannibal curses the Neanderthal actions which have led to this set-back. Outwardly, his smile remains undiminished.

"If you had the chance," Will asks, "would you do it all again...everything...just as you did?"

"No, " says Hannibal, experiencing a feeling of déjà vu," I would not."

"No?" Will asks with disbelief but not anger. He has moved beyond anger. "What would you have done differently? Who would have lived? Who would have died?"
Surely, Hannibal has considered this before. Whatever he tells doesn't alter the simple fact that Hannibal came back for me...risked his freedom to...

Will feels a stirring of gratitude and...something else.

Empowerment.

"Would my telling you this change anything ?" Hannibal asks lightly.

"Probably not...but tell me anyway." His question is both a command and a plea; a lover flexing his power over his beloved.

Hannibal leans in closer.

"Then let me say something you already know Will."

Hannibal closes his eyes and gently nuzzles his face against Will's ear. He feels when Will's pulse increases.

"You are here..." Hannibal is bestowing feather light kisses to Will's ears and neck with every few words," because... you can't imagine a day... an hour...or even a minute... without me in it."

Hannibal nuzzles Will's neck.

Will appears frozen, but Hannibal's words are settling into his psyche, like puzzle pieces neatly interlocking. He closes his eyes as he leans into Hannibal.

"Why?" His tone a plea. " I was fine... before you."

Hannibal cups Will's face tenderly. Will is working hard to control himself; he does not want to tremble.

"Open your eyes."

Will does.

Hannibal strokes Will's face with his thumbs.

"The teacup shattered, Will, we watched it, you and I, but look, it has come together, now, in this place, for us."

Will's fluttering gaze becomes fixed. *He is standing in a room of his mind palace he has never been in before and Hannibal is standing beside him. It's black marble floors surround*

them like a dark sea. The only light source is one shaft of light shining down from an opening in the domed ceiling. As Will watches, an object drops from the ceiling, traveling down the beam of light and crashes to the floor. It shatters; a fission of shards and particles. Next to him, Hannibal stirs. Then, Will watches as the pieces gather and bunch until finally, he can see what it is.

It is a teacup, perfect and whole.
Hannibal watches Will's eyes regain focus.

"Shall we go down then?" Will asks, taking one of Hannibal's hands into his own, " I'm starving," he smiles, " and something smells delicious."

Will's eyes are as clear and placid as the Aegean Sea.

Hannibal nods and grips the hand offered.

"Yes," he says, all friendly ease," I'm glad you have a good appetite," he says and looks thoughtful," And the truth is," he smiles, as they leave the room, " my cooking *has* kept me busy all day."

March, Public Library, Baltimore Maryland

"What about this one?" William asks, pulling a Captain Underpants book off the shelf.

"Too many hard words," complains Thomas.

Really? William's eyebrows quirk. *But it's half cartoons!*

"OK, what about a Clifford book?" He asks, spinning the carousel dedicated to "Easy Reader" books.

"Boring," says, Thomas, and William senses the boy is going to wander off if he doesn't come-up with an option, quick.

"What about one of those I Survived Books?" He asks.

Thomas turns around, intrigued.

Gotcha!

"Do they have one about sharks?" Thomas is already pawing through the collection.

"Yup," William says, "Number 2 : I Survived the Shark Attack of 1916," he says, pulling the dog eared copy out of the rack and handing it to the younger boy.

"1916?" Thomas wrinkles his nose. "That's so old, I don't want it!"

He hands the book back to William who sighs heavily.

"What about Pompeii? You know, the volcano that erupted and covered a whole city of people with ash?"

William is flipping through the Pompeii book as he speaks, hoping there will be photos.

"See?" He hands the book over. "These are casts Archeologists made of their bodies. They found hundreds of bodies, even some dogs," he says.

"Cool," Thomas says, grabbing to see for himself, and William breathes a sigh of relief. *Finally!*

Great! Let's check it out."

"I gotta go pee!"

"Well, just go to the little one here," William advises, pointing in the direction of the small, one stall bathroom which serves the children's section. William knows Thomas is about to say he needs William to go with him so he quickly adds, "I'll be right here. I'll keep my eyes on you the whole time! Then when we get home, you can tell the Merrill's how you were brave and went by yourself," he adds manipulatively.

"Ooookay."

Thomas is conflicted; he craves praise but his fears are profound

"But you won't be able to see me once I'm down the hallway," he protests.

"Yes, yes," William says glibly, busy gathering his homework packets and folders. "But I'll be here when you get back. Just go, you'll be fine!"

Thomas hesitates.

"Go!" William says, then grins, making a googly- eyed face at his foster brother. "See?" I'll be waaatching you."

Thomas giggles and begins to walk away, but continues to throws many backward glances as he goes. Finally, he reaches the wall which separates the bathroom's corridor from the main room. StoryTime has just finished, so many mothers and toddlers are heading towards the bathroom. Thomas watches William until his place in line advances forward and he finally disappears out of sight.

That toilet always has the worse line! William unzips his backpack.

"Hello William."

The boy looks up to see a woman, standing at the end of his table, purse open, digging through its contents.

He frowns.

"We don't have much time," she says opening her purse and bringing out her phone. "I'm a friend of your father's," she lies while pocketing the phone. Now she is pulling on and buttoning her coat.

To a casual observer, it would appear that she is unaware of the boy.

William looks up and counts two curved "eye in the sky" cameras in this room alone. *There must be more around the library.*

"Next week, same day, walk one block east, black Jag."

The woman knots her scarf, closes her purse and walks away.

Stunned, William watches her go.

Bedelia leaves the children's section, walks past the circulation desk and into the lobby. Working on a hunch, she grabs a free paper from its stand, and pretends to read it as she peers over its top.

Sure enough, William is following her.

When Thomas comes back seven minutes later, flushed with pride from conquering a fear, all he can find of William is his backpack.

Chapter End Notes

sorry Thomas, but don't worry, you'll be fine.

I'm open to suggestions about the next and final part of the series...if you have any suggetions, let me know!

End Notes

For those of you who didn't read the first part of this series: Hannibal was NOT staying with Will and William. Our poor Will is just confused.

Your kudos makes Hannibal accidentally sit on his fancy sketching pencils.

Your comments make a family of raccoons knock over his garbage cans night after night. ;0)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!